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ON THE WATERFRONT:
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

CLIFFORD METZ

A CITY IN TRANSITION: RICHMOND DURING WORLD WAR II

An Interview Conducted by
Judith K. Dunning
in 1986

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Clifford Metz in his greenhouse where he raises orchids, 1986.

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning

Cataloging information

METZ, Clifford (b. 1904)

Richmond resident

A City in Transition: Richmond During World War II, 1992, 129 pp.

Richmond, World War II: Ford tank depot, Kaiser Shipyards, new population, changes in racial composition, local entertainment, war housing; Richmond School Department, 1940s; postwar housing; decline of downtown. With an appended interview on family background and early work.

Introduction by Jim Quay, Director, California Council for the Humanities.

Interviewed 1986 by Judith K. Dunning for the Richmond Community History Series. Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.

After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence than a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay
Executive Director
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990
San Francisco, California

PREFACE

ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.

Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.

When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.

In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.

Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became their project, with a life of its own.

This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

September 1990
Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Clifford Metz

I recorded three interviews with eighty-seven year old Clifford Metz at his home in Rodeo in 1986. I was interested in talking to Mr. Metz because he had lived and worked in Richmond during the turbulent World War II years. He was employed by the General Accounting Office and worked out of the Ford Motor Plant in Richmond at a time when its operation changed from producing automobiles to refurbishing troop cars. In addition to his daytime job, Clifford Metz played trombone in local clubs on weekends.

When I asked Mr. Metz how all the wartime changes affected Richmond, he said that at the time he was "too damn busy" to think about it. It was after the war when he began a thirteen-year stint as business manager for the Richmond School District that he saw the results of Richmond's increased population in its overcrowded schools. In his new job he closely observed the school construction program.

For Mr. Metz the best times for Richmond were those pre-World War II years when the town was small. He remembered parades and rallies, a bustling downtown, and a community where people knew each other. He thinks Richmond's decline began when the city lost its downtown shopping district during the redevelopment era. In his words, "It's disintegrating to a piece here and there . . . there's no hub for the wheel." This sentiment is one I heard over and over from longtime residents.

During the course of this project, Mr. Metz and I became friends. At our first meeting he told me he was a bachelor and asked me to call him "Cliff." He has a real twinkle in his eye, a contagious laugh, and is very good company. At his suggestion we reviewed this transcript over a fish dinner overlooking the Carquinez Straits. I always enjoyed our interview sessions. When we finished taping he would play his trombone and show me his greenhouse filled with orchids. He often gave me fresh orchids to take home.

Clifford Metz was very supportive of this oral history project and extraordinarily patient in awaiting its completion. His is among the final six volumes in a collection of twenty from "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond,

California." They are available at The Bancroft Library, the Richmond Public Library, and six other libraries serving the San Francisco Bay Area.

At Mr. Metz's request we rearranged some sections in his oral history. The volume now begins with his work during the World War II period. The first interview covering the topics of family history and early work experience is included in the appendix.

Judith K. Dunning
Project Director

June 1992
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Clifford Metz -- Table of Contents

Work For Contra Costa County	1
World War II: Work at the Ford Tank Depot	3
Health and First Aid Programs	11
Protective Clothing	13
Lines for Cigarettes	14
Health Hazards	17
Schedule and Duties at the Ford Plant	18
Maritime Work With the General Accounting Office	19
Atmosphere of Richmond's Shipyard Days	23
New Population Moving Into Richmond	26
Early Richmond Neighborhoods	32
Changes in the City's Racial Composition	34
Local Wartime Entertainment	37
Makeshift War Housing	40
Richmond School Department, 1940s	42
Position as Business Manager	42
Public Law 815 and 874	44
School District's Right of Condemnation	47
Selection of Sites, and Construction of Schools	48
Postwar Richmond	59
School Department: Use of Portable Classrooms	60
Representative of the School District	63
Postwar Housing	67
Richmond Politics	71
Best Times for Richmond	73
Theaters in Richmond	74
Pre-War Recollections	76
Parchester Village	77
Influence of Churches	80
Postwar Decline of Downtown Richmond	82
Richmond's Historical Side	85
Closing Remarks	88
 Appendix A: Family Background and Early Work Experiences	 95

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name MR. R. CLIFFORD METZ
808 VAQUEROS AVE
RODEO CA 94572 

Date of birth 10/21/04 Birthplace Madera, Ca.

Father's full name Harry F. Metz

Occupation Mill Foreman Birthplace Indiana

Mother's full name Doris Humphrey

Occupation Housewife Birthplace ?

Your spouse(s) Pauline M. Hall

Your children - 0 -

Where did you grow up? Levi Grant Natl Park - Fresno,
Oakland, Richmond.

When did your family first come to California? _____

Reasons for coming _____

Present community Richmond, Ca. 40 years
Redwood, Ca. 20 years How long? _____

Education (and training programs) High School - 4 years U.C.
adult Education - Oakland,
accounting - Law

Occupation(s) Musicians, Accounting, Sales, Law.

Education - S.A.O. (Washington, D.C.) School

Business Mgr. (Richmond 14 1/2 years - Piedmont
continue on back page 14 1/2 years."

S.A.O. - Project Auditor - Richmond Tank Depot
1941-46 Kaiser Shipyards
#1-2-4

Work For Contra Costa County

[Interview 2: January 30, 1986]##¹

Dunning: You were beginning to tell me about your work for the county. Could you tell me briefly about that before we move into your work during World War II?

Metz: It would be a pleasure. It will take only a few minutes because it happened to be during the Depression, and any kind of a job was rather lucrative in those days. However, fortunately I was able to obtain a position as storekeeper with Contra Costa County Highways and Bridges Division under a gentleman of the name of Arnold, who was the county surveyor.

My office was located at the county garage [County Highway and Bridges Department] which is next to the Shell Oil refinery in Martinez, California. My title was storekeeper. My responsibilities included ordering and maintaining stock and parts for equipment repair, road maintenance and materials. Also, I prepared department employee payroll data and monthly reports to the county auditor's office.

¹This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended.

The county owned about one hundred pieces of road maintenance equipment comprised of a rock crusher, graders, shovels, rollers, bulldozers, and light and heavy trucks.

The garage personnel consisted of a superintendent, bridge construction and repair crew, equipment repair mechanics, blacksmith, and county building and equipment painting crew.

My tenure at the county garage was about two years. There was an opening in the county auditor's office and I was fortunate enough to have been selected for the position. This new position entailed receiving and authorizing payment of requisitions and invoices covering county garage material and supply requests. It also covered preparation of garage payroll and road maintenance personnel located in each of the county's five supervisorial districts.

While working at the county garage I attended two University of California evening adult classes to complete an additional two years of an advanced accounting course and one year of commercial laws. My only on-campus experience was working with Dr. Edgar Morphett, Dean of the School of Business Administration at U.C., on Saturdays. I was assisting Dr. Morphett in School of Business Administration instruction. This reference to on-campus assistance occurred while I was working for Richmond schools after 1946.

Dunning: Did you end up with your B.A. in accounting?

Metz: No, I have earned considerable units, but I didn't attend college as a regular daytime student.

World War II: Work at the Ford Tank Depot

Metz: Then came World War II. During World War I, I was too young to be drafted. World War II came along, and like a good American, I was going to try to do my duty if possible. I went over to join the navy. I made six trips to San Francisco. I took the day off on my own from the county. The navy always asked me to come back again and again.

Finally, one day I was going down the hall after an interview, and I was mumbling to myself, and an elderly gentleman, a captain, came out of the office in San Francisco, and he said, "Hey young man, what's the trouble?"

I explained my situation. He asked for my dossier and they brought it in. Finally he said, "Do you know what's the matter? You're too old. They don't want older people. They want the young fellows out of college."

I thought, "Well, okay."

So, he said, "However, if you're really interested in serving your country, would you like the army?"

I said, "That's not my favorite."

He said, "Just a minute." He got on the telephone quickly and he called a Major Jamart in the army ordnance department.

I was interviewed by this gentleman, this major. He said, "Now, you live in Richmond? We're opening a tank depot at the Ford automobile plant." A tank depot was remodeling and refurbishing all the available tanks they had at that time for overseas shipment.

I spent three days in San Francisco going over a cost plus contract and familiarizing myself with the requirements. I reported to the Ford plant and was shown the headquarters for the ordnance personnel. It was the showroom for the new Ford line of cars. I spent my time watching the plant remodeling process to handle the tanks.

I sat there all by myself. There was one desk and one chair. Then they employed a secretary and someone else who came out. We had this big, large room. Good gosh, it must have been a couple hundred feet long, it looked like to me. It was a block. That materialized into a pretty full-time job. Day and night, I'm speaking of, almost twenty-four hours. Things would happen and I would have to be called.

Dunning: What was your position at that point?

Metz: I was the project auditor.

Dunning: Did you feel prepared for the job?

Metz: Yes. I felt I was capable or I would have told him, because I wouldn't want to be trying to do something that would just hold up the whole procedure. No, I felt I was.

I stayed there, and I think I was with the ordnance department maybe six or eight months. The contractor was responsible to the ordnance, the ordnance was responsible to the General Accounting Office that's directly out of Washington D.C., who had the last word.

I received a request from the General Accounting Office asking if I would like to go work for them. I accepted.

Dunning: As a civilian?

Metz: Oh, yes. I was a civilian all the way through. I went to work with the General Accounting Office, but that entailed the Ford Tank Depot, Shipyards 1, 2, and 4. Shipyard 3 was strictly a British ship repair operation.

I enjoyed the responsibility very much, but it was a very exacting position because in general I had to check the USMC, [United States Maritime Commission] and the ordnance department. I was the General Accounting Office representative there. The big boss was in San Francisco. I had to be certain that the ordnance department was complying with the contract requirements, and that the United States Maritime

Commission was also doing it the way they should. The tank depot was--let's retrogress and go back.

Dunning: Yes, I would really like to hear about that. Did the Ford plant stop all their car production at that time?

Metz: Yes, the army took it over.

Dunning: Completely?

Metz: Absolutely. They would take me out to the proving grounds, and every time they had a new innovation, I would get a chance to ride in the tank. They had to strap me down and put a headgear on. They had all types of simulated warfare terrain out there. As soon as they had a tank supposedly ready to go, then they would have to try it out.

I took about eight or ten rides in different tanks. It was quite an experience.

Dunning: Was that part of your job, or was that something you volunteered for?

Metz: No, it wasn't required. It was purely voluntary on my part.

Dunning: Did you know that much about tanks?

Metz: Nope.

Dunning: How did you learn?

Metz: By just watching and going through the operations. At least once a week I took an hour or two hours and would go through the different operations. Certain types of tanks they did one thing to, another type of a tank they would do something else. They were getting it ready. So I just went around and I watched. Of course, the experience I had at the county with the equipment helped.

Dunning: That must have helped quite a bit.

Metz: Quite a bit, yes. I didn't have anything to do with the mechanical parts specifically, but I had to know the contractional arrangements.

Dunning: You had to know the overall operation?

Metz: Yes. I had to know what was going on out there, not for my responsibility, but to be sure that the contractor was complying with the regulations as established, to do the job and watch to see that they didn't overlook something.

Dunning: I'm curious as to whether Ford kept on their regular personnel, or were they--?

Metz: Yes, yes they did. I don't know to what extent. That's one thing I never asked about and I didn't care, because I had the responsibility for the people under my specific jurisdiction. But Ford didn't dismiss anybody that I know of.

Dunning: They probably needed everybody.

Metz: Oh, yes, but in those days they needed everyone they could get, of course.

Dunning: About how many people were working at the Ford plant?

Metz: That's a difficult question. I would say five or six hundred. They had shifts.

Dunning: Were they on the twenty-four hour shifts also?

Metz: Yes. Well, part of the time. Some of the time they weren't, depending on the number of tanks available for modification. Let me get something over here.
[shows photograph of office employees' group]

[tape interruption]

Dunning: Well, they were very nice pictures you just showed me.

Metz: It's reminiscing about what occurred, and it shows some of the office personnel involved, and the area as well. I should have taken some pictures in the shop back then when there were some of the tanks being modified.

Dunning: Were there many women working at the plant?

Metz: Yes. They had some women there. But the shipyards were the ones that really had the women.

Dunning: The shipyards I know really got the women, but I was wondering if there were women working at the Ford plant before the war and if they were kept on.

Metz: That I don't know. I'm not familiar with the Ford personnel prior to the time when I went out there to supervise.

Dunning: Did the inside of the building change much during that time?

Metz: No, they utilized the space very well. The showroom was the office. I think they had some partitions there, if I remember correctly, for this department and that department, and a few others. They didn't do anything specifically to change the building per se.

Dunning: Do you know if they designed the new troop cars and tank cars also?

Metz: Not there, no. When the equipment would arrive on trains, then they would take it off and then they would get it. There was a lot of remodeling that had to be done to these tanks, particularly since most of them were going over the sand dunes.

Dunning: So most of the tanks were remodeled rather than built from scratch?

Metz: There was no building from scratch, none whatsoever. This was just a building refurbishing the tanks. That's what it really amounted to. For a specific type of operation.

Dunning: Did most of the tanks come from Washington, or do you have any idea of their origin?

Metz: I can't remember, frankly. But they had several places in the United States where they manufactured the tanks. Big automobile companies changed from manufacturing automobiles to constructing tanks.

Dunning: I'm wondering what the atmosphere was like. Was there a patriotic atmosphere, or--?

Metz: Yes, it was very patriotic. Everyone who I had any relations with, they were all gung ho, if you want to call it that. They were very much interested in seeing that whatever they were doing was done as properly and as quickly and as aptly.

We had people at the Ford plant who had no idea at all what a piece of equipment was like, or a machine. They did a lot of lathe work out there and that type of thing. But it didn't take very long for them to learn, because at that time the shipyards were getting going.

Dunning: Was the Ford tank depot like the shipyards in terms of people having just a little job on the assembly line, so they learned that specific thing?

Metz: Yes, that was right. Maybe you have some information on this already, but the shipyards had welders, electricians, carpenters, mechanics, plumbers, and everything else you could think of. They had the same situation at Ford in part, but the shipyards were the ones that took on the thousands who arrived in Richmond.

Health and First Aid Programs

Dunning: Do you know whether the people who worked in the Ford plant got the same benefits as the shipyard workers in terms of health?

Metz: Yes, whatever there was. In those days, the full complete health program--I think Kaiser was instituted at that time. It's called a first aid place now, but they had what they called Kaiser Hospital. It was down off of Cutting Boulevard in Richmond.

Dunning: Were Ford employees also Kaiser members?

Metz: I don't know, because Kaiser didn't institute until all this situation occurred. I couldn't answer that question, frankly.

Dunning: How about yourself at that time? Did you have health benefits through Ford?

Metz: No, my benefits were all federal. I was a federal employee. I had nothing to do with Ford. I had nothing to do with Kaiser.

Dunning: Being a federal employee, what were your benefits?

Metz: I had whatever benefits were available.

Dunning: Did you have health benefits?

Metz: I think so. That's a question I'm unable to answer, truthfully. I know I had retirement. You accumulated x number of days. So when I left I just was paid for the amount of vacation and sick leave I had accumulated.

Dunning: I know in a number of the shipyards they had a first aid station in every different area. Did they at Ford?

Metz: Oh, definitely. Ford definitely had two or three first aid stations in different parts of the building. Outside, inside. It was a large plant.

Dunning: Yes, it's gigantic. Would they have industrial nurses?

Metz: They had nurses there. I don't know whether they had internists or not. If there was anything necessary, they were taken to a hospital immediately. Cottage Hospital was down in that area, and then the Richmond Hospital, and there was two or three at that time.

Dunning: Would you consider the work being done there dangerous?

Metz: I presume any type of vocational program like that for individuals would be in part, yes. If you're not careful and if you don't listen to instructions. But they had all the possible safety devices on every piece of equipment.

Protective Clothing

Dunning: Can you give me some examples of those?

Metz: For instance, they had it in the welding department. You never touched a torch unless you had your hood on and you had your gloves on.

Dunning: Did people wear protective clothing?

Metz: Oh, yes, if it was required, depending on the job. I don't think they wore special clothing for the welding, but there were other operations. In the painting department, and booths which were all very well ventilated, you wore a filtered mask and certain types of clothes when you were spray painting. Sometimes they had to put some certain parts on these tanks. There were restrictions about how you had to do it, and there wasn't any question about it. They had some safety devices to stop something if it was inadvertently operated. The army did a very fine job on that, and Kaiser did, too.

Dunning: Do you recall any accidents on the job, it being such a big place?

Metz: That wouldn't come under my jurisdiction specifically. There wasn't anything that I could refer to, no. My operation was all in the office unless I was going around out there to determine how they were handling it.

Lines for Cigarettes

Dunning: Do you know if they had certain rules in the workplace, like against smoking or drinking?

Metz: No, no liquor whatsoever. Of course, some sorts of fellows might have brought in a little thermos. But per se, no. Certain areas you could smoke, and other areas were restricted. I couldn't be specific, but I know that there were certain types of operations where smoking was prohibited.

Dunning: Was there a cafeteria?

Metz: Yes there was quite a large one there at the Ford Depot. Of course, Kaiser had cafeterias also. I remember just a funny little thing. Most people were smoking in those days much more than today. So, they had certain days of the week that they had cigarettes on sale. You have one or maybe two packages, depending. All they had were Camels, Chesterfields, and Luckys.

Lucky green gone to war, they said. Remember? Yes, there was three. They would stand in line. You were allowed two. Of course, whatever happened, when the cigarettes came in everybody knew it. They allowed so many at a time to get in line so they didn't disturb the operation. There would be fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five, and they would get their cigarettes. There was kind of a group situation. Sometimes they had to close a whole little area. But they all came and got their cigarettes.

Dunning: One person told me that there was a line for everything then, and one was a line for cigarettes. This one fellow told me that he would see a line and he didn't know what they were even selling, but yet he'd get in the line anyway.

Metz: Yes, they had lines for all types of things like that. But those cigarettes, I just happen to remember that because those that smoked, they wanted that. You're going to get one or two packages, and that was a week. It only came in about once a week.

Dunning: There must have been kind of a black market going on?

Metz: There was, there's no doubt about it. Of course, they sent millions of them overseas.

Dunning: Did you smoke?

Metz: Yes. Not too much. Very little. The most I ever smoked I think was a package of cigarettes that would last me a couple of days. I smoked up until the year before this Christmas.

Dunning: Oh. So you've been smoking most of your life?

Metz: I didn't start in until I was about thirty or thirty - five.

Dunning: Thirty until almost eighty?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: That's a long time.

Metz: Yes, but I didn't smoke too heavily. I never smoked when I was playing music. Never.

Dunning: Playing the trombone?

Metz: Yes. Never. I mean, you would smoke off the job probably, but no. I decided heck's sake, I'm getting tired of this. I would work in my office back there, and I would have one going, and I wouldn't take two puffs on it and put it over here. I said that was too expensive, what the heck is this. I said, "This is it." I stopped right then and I said, "No." There were four cigarettes left in that little package. It's still in my desk. I just threw it in the back.

Dunning: That's a good reminder.

Metz: Yes, to be a good boy.

Dunning: Do you remember what cigarettes cost then in line?

Metz: Oh my God. No.

Dunning: They're about \$1.25 now.

Metz: Oh, yes. Gee, were they thirty-five, forty, fifty cents?

Dunning: I thought I heard closer to a quarter.

Metz: A quarter, yes. My gosh almighty, they were practically nil as far as the price was concerned. Isn't that a funny question? I can't remember.

Health Hazards

Dunning: These days there's so much emphasis on asbestosis and asbestos in the workplace. Did you ever think about that at that time?

Metz: No one gave any inkling of a thought to it. Nothing. No, none at all.

Dunning: Or any other toxins, or--?

Metz: That type of thing didn't enter into most people's minds, I don't think. Maybe in the medical profession, naturally, but as far as the layperson is concerned, I don't think that they are. People worried about the measles and the mumps and the whooping cough and the dyptheria and that type of thing. I don't think people gave much thought to asbestos or any other type of toxin in the working area.

Dunning: Looking back now, do you think that you worked in a dangerous situation?

Metz: I don't think so, no. Even out at the county, when I was working at the county garage with all that equipment and everything. It's your own fault if you

get hurt most of the time. Shut that thing [recorder] off a minute.

Dunning: Do I have to?

Metz: Yes.

[tape interruption]

Schedule and Duties at the Ford Plant

Dunning: When you worked at the office in the Ford plant, did you have a typical schedule?

Metz: Like most office procedures, yes, but it was subject to change immediately if something came over the wire or the telephone, directions for me to see that this is incorporated in the procedure or something. Yes, but normally it was a procedural position. Of course, as I said, somebody would call and I had to go out in the shop. That's what I call procedure--it's just part of the responsibility.

Dunning: Were there ever any times that were particularly crazy or intense?

Metz: I don't remember any.

Dunning: Any crisis from Washington when you had to get a certain number of tanks out?

Metz: No. During the school days, though, when I left the government, why that was a different situation.

Dunning: What do you mean?

Metz: I'll tell you about it later.

Dunning: Okay.

Maritime Work With the General Accounting Office

Metz: From Ford I went to Kaiser.

Dunning: How long were you at Ford?

Metz: I'll tell you, I was looking for that schedule I had and I can't find it. I must have thrown it away I presume. I was there at Ford for say six or eight months. Then, I worked directly with the GAO. They were my boss. Then I turned around and I was the boss.

When I was working for the General Accounting Office, we had priority. We were responsible for what the army was doing, to see that they did it properly, monetarily and procedurally as well. If they were entering some sort of procedure that was prohibitive, then we had to report it. If there were discrepancies in any of their invoices submitted, the General Accounting Office came in and we would audit.

Kaiser had to give us a copy of every invoice. We would ask them for their invoices and they would give us the invoices. We would go through and look. Then they had this recap also. Sometimes it will take you fifteen minutes for a box of a hundred, and sometimes it will take you an hour, depending on what you're looking for.

But supposedly you're sharp enough to look at something that looked like it was legitimate. If you didn't think it was then you had to go back to the contractor and ask to see some further detail, the requisitioning of the material and what for. That's what we were looking for: erroneous procedures as well as errors in monetary situations.

Dunning: Since the contractors were working on a cost plus basis, did you find many discrepancies that--?

Metz: Occasionally.

Dunning: It seems like it would be very tempting.

Metz: We did, occasionally, yes. If there was anything at all, that didn't come under the area that I was working, general accounting, so it would have had to be at the top level someplace along, finding out if they were intentionally trying to do something. Ours was generally a--go ahead.

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Metz: Do you have the tape on?

Dunning: Yes.

Metz: Where was I?

Dunning: You were saying you may not see the particular discrepancies in your job.

Metz: Yes, but at the same time, something comes through that looks a little peculiar that you wonder what they're using whatever the purchase was, what are they using that for. You ask, "Well, how are you using this in shipbuilding? What's this for?" Or an exorbitant price.

After you've worked there a while to see why are they paying \$150 when the last one was \$75. That's not the situation, but that's the thing that we were primarily interested in, that the proper procedure is being used in the total overall picture of the operations.

Dunning: Were you working with the subcontractors to Kaiser, or just Kaiser contractors?

Metz: No. Kaiser had their own subs. Kaiser would be paying the sub if there was such a situation. We would be auditing whatever Kaiser had payed.

Dunning: So you didn't have to deal directly with the contractors or the subcontractors?

Metz: No.

Dunning: Basically just Kaiser?

Metz: Yes. That's all. That's all we were there for. Of course, they had Moore shipyards. They had a person in charge of that from the GAO.

Dunning: When you said Moore, is that the Joseph Moore Shipyards?

Metz: Yes, down in Oakland. Then they had the Stockton Pollock. That was another repair place. I guess they did mostly repairing at the Stockton Pollock. Then they had Vallejo over here, which was the naval depot [Mare Island]. We had nothing to do with that.

The shipyard was a very interesting procedure. I enjoyed going from the study of the hull all the way up to the complete trial. I took two or three trips out the gate on ships, trying them out and seeing if it didn't turn around and come back accidentally or something.

Dunning: So you would get to know almost every part of a ship?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: Would you mostly see it on paper first?

Metz: Oh, yes. But I didn't have too much time for all that. I would watch ships as they started, with the hull, and then they would go up to this, and to this, and to this, and this, until they were ready. They used bananas and all that kind of stuff for the skids, tool.

Dunning: Really?

Metz: Yes, to slide it off when they knocked the chocks out.

Atmosphere of Richmond's Shipyard Days

Dunning: Where was your office at that time? Which shipyard?

Metz: Three. It was at three. It was a very interesting experience for me. Ultimately though as far as the shipyards are concerned, people came in though. I remember, I think I mentioned it was about six trainloads a day came in. Some of those people didn't have any place to stay, didn't have anything. They just recruited them. They had to have thousands of people to run those shipyards, to operate. It was amazing.

They had a training area, too. If you wanted to be a welder or a carpenter or a this or a that, whatever it might be, they had a school that you attended to see that you at least knew what a saw was about. Then, if you got on the job, why, there's in-training on the job, too. But the first thing, you had to find out what you were going to be asked to do on a position, if you want to call it that.

Dunning: Did you have much contact with shipyard workers?

Metz: No, none.

Dunning: One thing that kind of surprised me when I started interviewing people about the shipyard, I assumed that many Richmond residents would go into the shipyards and work.

Metz: Not too many.

Dunning: But what I've found is that most of the Richmond residents knew that there was an end in sight and kept their regular jobs, even though they would make a whole lot more money at the shipyards.

Metz: Yes, that's a factual statement you just made. Yes, absolutely. Good gosh, they have their homes here, they lived here, and they were working here. They either worked for the Standard Oil--not necessarily that, but there were other activities. They made drums out here, steel drums, and you had other things. People understood that. I guess there were some who probably went to work for the shipyards. I remember a few, but very few. Most of them knew that this was going to be just a temporary situation.

Dunning: How was it for you as a Richmond resident to see all these newcomers? The population went from twenty-three thousand to well over a hundred thousand in a two year period.

Metz: I'll tell you, it came so fast you didn't have a chance to do any self analyzation. I didn't at least. It was bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. I got in this position, I went there, then I went to the Ordnance Department, and that was in something I had to learn

quick and fast. Then I went from there to the GAO, and that was something I had to tackle.

The immensity of all these people, it was just like looking at when I used to play music. You would get in a theater and you're onstage with a band, you look out there, and whatever you had to do, there was just a sea of faces. You didn't pay any attention to it. You had a certain thing to do, and that was all.

I guess I liken it to that, because you got a little irked once in a while about some of the things that occurred that weren't just too pleasant, but mostly it worked out fairly well. I guess you knew all about how they went out to North Richmond and built all those housing units for them there. Then they went out where the Santa Fe was, across from there on old Cutting around down by the shipyards, and they built the housing units there. I think you probably have all of that information from someone else.

Dunning: I really don't. In fact, when someone told me I would be interviewing you, they said that you were involved with the Housing Authority.

Metz: All right, now, we haven't hit the school department yet.

Dunning: Okay. Well, you were involved in the Housing Authority?

Metz: Oh, yes. Definitely.

Dunning: But that was after--?

Metz: In other words, I left the GAO. They wanted me to go to what is now Cape Canaveral, or Cape Kennedy. And it was a good boost in salary. I wasn't interested in leaving. I said, "Sorry, I have other ideas that I would prefer to do--another vocation, and I don't want to go clear back there." So I didn't. That's when I left General Accounting Office.

I had some nice friends. I still get Christmas cards from two or three. The rest of them are all gone that I worked with out of the GAO. One of them was in San Francisco. One came in to the shipards finally, but another one was at Moore Shipyards, and one of them was from the Ford.

Now, there was cost plus, price minus, and fixed price contracts, and all that type of thing. These fellows, each one of them had their own area of responsibility. With a fixed price contract, or a price minus, different procedures were involved in each one of those.

New Population Moving Into Richmond

Dunning: Before we move on to your finishing up with the General Accounting Office, I would like to get more of a sense of Richmond during those war years and anything that really stands out in your mind.

Metz: Well, it was horrendous, really, because they came in, as I mentioned, six trainloads a day at first. Of course, I had no responsibility at that time directly with any of them, but the people came in. Of course, the minute they got there, if that's what they came for, was to work, they would put them in these schools for different types of occupational therapy for them. So they had job training.

But it got to be kind of a mess for about a year, a year and a half. Frankly, some of them didn't know what we were talking about, and we didn't understand their language particularly. I mean, we would talk about a pound of this, and it would be a peck of this. We had to learn to know each other. I know everybody had the same difficulty.

They didn't--what shall I say?--they didn't equate very well with the people. They had their own way of living, that's all it was, and we didn't live that way. We lived differently. But they finally got around to where they understood why we were doing something and why we did this. There was just too many, that's all.

You didn't know--I always call them colored people. Now you say that and it's worse than I don't know what. Nevertheless, they're blacks. But those people had their own M.O.

Dunning: Their own what?

Metz: M.O.--method of operation. That's an expression. Then the people from Louisiana would come, and from

Oklahoma, Arkansas. Each one of those were used to living within a certain sphere of activity. Well, they came out here and they all had to change. They had a heck of a time trying to change, as well as we did, I guess, to them, trying to understand why they didn't want to do this, why they wouldn't do that, why they shouldn't.

Metz: For instance, if you had a chicken--this is funny, but I used to hear them kid each other. If you had a chicken, and somebody else didn't have any chicken, he would come and get your chicken. That's it. They explained it sometimes, some of the difficulties they were having.

The police department, it grew like a son of a gun in a hurry. It had to to kind of control some of the activities, potentials, for instance, where it might occur.

It was so large, and right now yesterday it was here. Here, yesterday, you were sitting under the apple tree, and now, by God, the apple tree is gone and there's fifty thousand people standing around. I don't know. I have no impression of how that affected me. I don't think it did much. I mean, here it is, and what am I going to do with it. You just have to start figuring out, what do I do next. I guess some of it might have been trial and error, too.

Dunning: I've interviewed some residents of Richmond who were from early families. A couple of people thought that everyone would leave when the shipyards closed. They just had this idea.

Metz: That was unfortunate, yes.

Dunning: And they thought they would get their little small town back again.

Metz: No, once that growth occurred, that was it. I think we went down maybe ten or fifteen thousand people in a short time. Most of them, well, they had learned that they liked it here. Some of them, with the money they had, they could invest. They weren't unintelligent people, they just weren't used to living and acting as people do in a metropolis.

Dunning: Most of the people were from rural areas.

Metz: Oh, definitely. Farmers, yes. But I never had the idea that they would leave.

Dunning: That was probably wise not to have that idea. That was kind of an illusion, I think.

Metz: Yes. Some of the people I know, they were quite disappointed that they didn't get back to the good old days as they called it. I heard some remarks about it, even from friends of mine. I was always quite interested in ancient history in high school, and I knew all about everything that had happened way back before and after, B.C. and A.D. and everything. No, I used to be able to quote even quotes out of it.

I remember what happened in Rome, well Roma, and what happened in Greece and all around here. I looked

at that and I said, "Well, here these people are. They're not going to leave here. This is Mecca."

Dunning: One man was telling me, "We thought the newcomers were going to leave because all they did was complain. They would say, 'We have to stand in line for this. We can't get housing. It's foggy.' Some of them did leave, but then they came back with the rest of their families."

Metz: Well now, I was going to say, California had and has--I forget how long you have to be here, and then you get benefits.

Dunning: A year residency?

Metz: Yes, something like that. But once they were established, then the grandma and grandpa, they would have them come out. Then the cousins would come out. Pretty soon, there are six families living in one room. They would get out here fast because California gave them money in addition to what they could earn. So, as I said, this was Mecca, believe me. I wasn't enamored by it, but--

Dunning: Your wife Pauline, she was a Richmond person.

Metz: She was born in Weaverville. Her father was a district attorney in Trinity County and then moved to Richmond.

Dunning: But she went through most of her school in Richmond?

Metz: Oh yes, definitely.

Dunning: How did she react to the changes?

Metz: Probably she followed my approach to the problem. Honestly, I don't think I payed much attention to it I was so involved in my work.

Dunning: It sounds like everyone was caught in a tide.

Metz: Yes. Here it is, and you sink or swim. Well, if you learn how to swim well enough, you can at least try to get an extra stroke before the next wave came. Frankly, my recollection, I was, "Oh my gosh, how long are we going to have to do this. They keep coming and coming and coming. Where are we going to put them?"

I wasn't in city government or city. My vocation was at the county and that type of thing. Or even, as I say, it was Breuner's and then one peculiar thing.

During the Depression a lot of people didn't have a job. I went around looking for a job. This is way back in the twenties or thirties. In the old days--you're not familiar with it yet, but then you never would be. They had a little electric cord that came down from the ceiling, and there was a light bulb on the end of it. That was all they had for light in a room. I sold this type of light fixture that was installed in the ceiling. I was working for PG&E at the time.

I got eighty cents for every one of them I sold. I went around house to house. I went boom, boom, boom. I just plunked myself in this block, go this

way, this way, and this way, and then go this way, and from house to house to sell this. I think they came to about \$2.80 or something. I would get in, just demonstrate, twist it on and show them how. They had a reflector in them. It was a honey. I got eighty cents for every one I sold. I would make sometimes five, six, seven dollars a day. That paid the grocery bill. Pardon, you don't want to go into that. That's extraneous.

Dunning: Well, it gives an interesting--

Metz: That's way back. But Polly and I, both of us had a, "Well, here it is I guess" attitude. We never discussed it that way.

Early Richmond Neighborhoods

Dunning: What neighborhood were you living in?

Metz: In Mira Vista. I was up, yes, way up. We were on Carlston Street. That's about five or six blocks above San Pablo. What I was going to say is that way back when I was going to high school, before I got married, I would go up to Polly's. You could look. There wasn't anything. There was one, two, three, four houses up in that area. That was back in 1921, '22, '23. You look from there clear down to Twenty-third Street. I think there were four or five farmhouses down there. Two of them had windmills.

That's way back in the twenties. Then it started to build up.

Dunning: I interviewed one woman whose family owned the Pullman Bakery, the Clausen family. She showed me a picture, and there was nothing around at all. Cutting Boulevard wasn't there. She and I made a trip out to her old house, which is at Twenty-third and Cutting. Now the old bakery is a beauty parlor and there are probably eight different families living in the building. It's really run down, but she described what it was like, and there was nothing. She said there were no neighbors, nothing.

Metz: No, nothing. No, there wasn't anything.

Dunning: It sounds like you were getting that same view.

Metz: The same thing, the same general idea. They used to call that Best Hill. It was around Fortieth Street or something like that, up towards San Pablo? As a matter of fact, I was so doggone busy trying to work someplace or do something that I didn't--well, it just entered in my mind, "So what? I got a job to do, let's go on the job now." Turn that [recorder] off.

[tape interruption]

Changes in the City's Racial Composition

Dunning: One of the issues that I want to ask you about is the change in the racial composition of Richmond, because there were approximately fifteen black families in Richmond before the war started and then there was a huge influx of southern blacks. But also there were midwesterners and southern whites. It seems to me that these were people who weren't used to living together, and I'm wondering if that was much of a problem.

Metz: Yes. Personally I wasn't involved in any of it. I wasn't downtown enough in those days to be able to see too much. But there was a certain period there. I think that finally these people who came from different parts of the country somehow or other began to recognize that they couldn't run the show, there was other people who were involved. I don't think they ever really got together as a group, but they began to recognize the responsibilities of the blacks from here, and the whites from the South who didn't want them to--I mean, the old story has been there ever since the Civil War. That type of thing.

Then, I think it was Oklahoma or Arkansas. One of them, they had group there that was a little bit on the belligerent side. But they tamed down. I'm not familiar, but I know the police department had quite a bit of difficulty. It finally got to the place where the minor things had to be forgotten.

Dunning: Ignored.

Metz: Ignored entirely, probably. I didn't get into any of that because I was involved in a different aspect of operations until I got to the school department.

Dunning: Do you know offhand--I ask this to everybody about the war housing--they had a black section and a white section--whether that was done consciously.

Metz: That I wouldn't be able to answer because I think they endeavored as best they could to get certain types of people living all together in an area, whether they were from whites, blacks, southerners or midwesterners.

But they didn't have too much trouble. I know when they started the housing, what they had to do right away--see, the colored people lived in North Richmond. Then they got Parchester Village way out, way out almost clear to the end of the bay out there. I had nothing to do with that. There wasn't anything that I was familiar with, but I know I heard lots of stories about what was going on, animosity.

Dunning: Any that stand in your mind?

Metz: No, because I didn't pay any attention to it. I wasn't interested.

Dunning: It didn't affect your life?

Metz: No, it didn't, not mine at all. I know you used to go down about Ninth or Tenth Street ultimately and there would be four or five of some of the belligerent

groups, and they would string out across the sidewalk and you had to get out in the street to go around. That happened to me personally a couple of times.

Dunning: When you talk about the belligerent groups, who were they?

Metz: Any group. They could be whites or blacks or anything else. They were just a gang. I don't know how often it happened, but I know a couple of times I went downtown it was like a phalanx. Boom, boom, boom, and there was no room other than five guys walking down the sidewalk. If you wanted to go, you either backed up or you went out in the street and went around.

Dunning: From some of the people I talked to who came from perhaps Iowa, they seemed to stick together when they got here. They didn't make friends, at least not right away with the people who lived in Richmond, and some of them still have their little group.

Metz: I don't think any of them ever did. Richmond being the population it was, and it was so overcome with four times the population in a very short time, there wasn't any time to know anyone else. You only know the people in town and you had a heck of a time trying to find them in the mass of people who were here. That must have been. I don't remember very many stories about that, but I know very well that your statement is correct that groups would come from certain areas and they would endeavor to get together in the living quarters and the activities. They had different social activities, too.

Local Wartime Entertainment

Dunning: It seemed like a lot of clubs started at that time, with different kinds of dancing.

Metz: Oh yes, definitely.

Dunning: I heard one story about a dance at one of the dance halls. Some of the men would be so proud of their work clothes that they would wear their construction boots with the steel-tipped toes to the dance and think that they were really something.

Metz: Talk about dancing, there was a place on Sixth Street. I have a picture in there I'll show you. I think it went downstairs, and I don't know how the heck they ever allowed them to have a dance down there because they would never get out of the place. There was only one area to get out of unless you climbed out windows. I played there Friday and Saturday nights even when I was working with the GAO.

Dunning: So you played there during the war years?

Metz: Oh yes.

Dunning: What kind of a crowd was there?

Metz: It would be soldiers and sailors and mostly USO. You had people coming from all over town too, but the soldiers and sailors came in when they were off duty. It was a place that they could go to relax.

Dunning: The kind of music that was requested, did that change a lot?

Metz: Not too much, no.

Dunning: What kind of music were you playing?

Metz: All what they call the old twenties and thirties and forties, their favorites. I think we had an eleven or twelve piece band.

Dunning: You must have gotten a whole lot more playing dates during this time.

Metz: Oh my gosh yes. I could have played, gone steady if I had wanted to, but I wasn't interested in the music to that extent. I had had my turn at it and all I wanted was to just have some fun. I enjoyed playing, though. I always did. I didn't have any trouble.

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Dunning: Did a lot more clubs open up on San Pablo Avenue?

Metz: Yes, quite a few. They had five, and then out at the county line--they called it no-man's land. You could go out there and bet on anything you wanted. The jurisdiction didn't belong to any city, and it was the county. What did they call it? Anyway, it was one of the big bosses for the gangs.

Dunning: Mafia?

Metz: I don't know whether it was mafia or not, but it was operated by some people who had some money. I don't know who it was. Nobody did. I played out at a couple of places out there too, yes.

Dunning: Did you see a big increase in country-western music?

Metz: No, not until after the war was over. That, I think, is when I noticed it mostly. Oh yes, you were playing [imitates sound]. You would play some of that. We had to learn. But not too much. It was mostly just modern, like big band music.

Dunning: Were there many or any blues clubs that opened in Richmond during those war years?

Metz: I don't remember specifically. They probably had some.

Dunning: I've heard of a really old place called Minni Lou's, in North Richmond.

Metz: That would have been in the black area.

Dunning: Yes.

Metz: No, I'm not familiar with it.

Makeshift War Housing

Dunning: We talked a little about the housing problem. I heard that a lot of people would just bring their trailers and go to an empty lot and put their trailer there until they got kicked out.

Metz: Yes, that occurred.

Dunning: Did you see much of that?

Metz: Not too much, no, but I did. That was initially the way they were handling it. The Housing Authority and everybody else had to get going fast to take care of the people without having to put a piece of tin up around a cardboard someplace so you can keep the rain off.

They did, though. I remember some of them, they would get all the old lumber they could find, any doggone thing, and they would make a shack out of it. Then the whole family would be there and they had one entrance and no windows probably in some of those things. This was initially, just for a month or two until they could get located.

Dunning: I know one woman I spoke to came all the way from Iowa on a train by herself and she was meeting her husband. She envisioned this little white house with a picket fence.

Metz: [laughs]

Dunning: Her husband at that time wasn't in war housing, but he was in a men's boarding house. Of course she couldn't stay there. So when she wasn't met at the train station, and she went over to the boarding house, she and her husband had to go find someplace else to stay that night. It wasn't exactly what she had dreamed of.

Metz: Well, I think that that was the case for most of the people who came out here. They had been sold a bill of goods about the wonders of California, and particularly in the Bay Area and San Francisco. I think a lot of them wondered when they got out here, "Well, this isn't the way I had understood that it was going to happen." They had no idea they were going to be thrown out to fend for themselves.

Dunning: Right. I know this particular woman, her marriage broke up almost immediately, but she was frozen in her job so she couldn't leave to go back home. She ended up staying and really liking the area, but it seemed like it would be incredibly traumatic.

Metz: It would be. I imagine situations like that, unless you were talking to someone who had either been very close to something that happened or been through the mill themselves. I was just too doggone busy taking care of my vocation, that's all. I knew some things were going on. There were very peculiar things going on. I would hear about them, but personally I don't think I have ever had the opportunity to see or listen to too much of it. I didn't have much time. Saturdays and Sundays were the same thing. It was go, go, go.

Dunning: Yes, it just sounds like everything was booming.

Metz: Yes, and you had to boom along with it, try to get ahead of it if possible, which never occurred.

Richmond School Department, 1940s

Position as Business Manager

Dunning: I am very interested in your recollections of the school department.

Metz: All right. When I left the GAO I went to work for the Richmond school department. Here's what happened. Richmond had two districts, an elementary school district and a high school district. Two boards of education, each independent of the other. I can't remember exactly what happened, but I know the then--

Metz: superintendent, Walter Helms. Superintendent Helms requested each board to employ one business manager to handle both districts' business activities.

The superintendent, it was getting too big for him. I mean, two school districts and here all this new population coming in.

Dunning: Are we talking about the war years now?

Metz: Yes, still. I got a call from a gentleman who wanted to know if I might be interested in going to work for the school department. I said, "I don't know." I thought it over. I called him back in a couple of days and said, "Yes."

Let's make it short and sweet. I went to work for the school department. At that time there was no business department per se. They had a bookkeeping department or something. When I went in they were about five or six months behind in paying their bills. There were big stacks all the way around a big room, this high with invoices. The net was that I finally got that cleared up. Then they had to build schools. This was very early.

Dunning: Could you give me an idea of the year that you're talking about?

Metz: 1946.

Dunning: Okay, so it's right after the war.

Metz: Yes. These people who were coming in, they had to find schools. We didn't have them. There was a congressional committee of six members who came out and went to Richmond, Vallejo, and San Diego for the initiation of funds to cover construction and maintenance of school buildings. That was about a year before they really got going. I remember one question they asked. I have a part of the congressional record of my remarks. The superintendent and I were invited, or commanded, to

make this little trip. We went over to San Francisco. They were all congressmen or senators.

Now, "Mr. Metz, I'd like to ask you--" He was one of the old boys from the South. "I'd like to ask you all a question."

I said, "Yes sir."

He said, "Now, what would you do if you had to employ a colored person? Does he get the same treatment?"

I said, "He's a citizen. I see no reason why he shouldn't have. Why should color make any difference?"

Oh my God. A smile went all over his face. I had been around enough that if that's what he wants, it was what he was going to get. It was my opinion, too, because really, if you want to succeed in anything you have to have a little education someplace along the line or do it yourself.

Public Law 815 and 874

Metz: The net result of all these congressmen who interviewed these people in Richmond and Vallejo and San Diego, was that they initiated and passed two bills. Public law 815, which gave our type of district the privilege of building schools for these

people and furnishing everything. It didn't cost us anything. All we had to do was get some teachers. That was to build new units. Then there was a public law 874. That provided funds for maintenance, repairs, and that type of thing.

So, being business manager, I was in charge of all that type of thing. The applications had to be made and they were voluminous. My goodness, it was page after page after page. We had a school of instruction over in San Francisco, and this fellow from San Diego and another fellow from Vallejo and I went over to this school. The federal government sent him out from Washington told us what it was, gave us all the type of papers we had to fill out.

Okay, we each took our bundle about like this to go through. We would call each other on the telephone all the time and talk about this and that. We had to. Gee whiz, they wanted the schools yesterday. It finally landed that I was negotiating for all three areas collectively, but they had to do their own detailed applications.

Dunning: All three areas for--?

Metz: For schools, to construct and maintain schools for these people. We didn't have these schools for them. We only had a high school and a junior high.

Dunning: And during and after the war most everyone went on double session?

Metz: Oh yes, until sufficient schools were built to handle the increased school population. We ended up with I don't know how many. Forty schools or something like that.

Dunning: So there were no new schools built during the war years?

Metz: That's what I'm coming to. We had to have them. I made about ten or twelve trips back to Washington D.C. representing the three of us. Richmond had the first application that was approved, Vallejo had the second, and San Diego, I think, had the third. But I was going back and forth. Of course, other school districts were included. I must have made ten trips up I guess.

I remember one. We had to send our applications in. Here I went back, and this room was just stacked like this with applications from throughout the United States. New York, all up and down the East Coast, and all the West Coast, Portland, and from all over. I selected ours and got those out, but they were all supposed to be the same thing.

I had to go back two or three times. One of the congressmen wanted me to come back and check something. They had no instructions, nothing. Here were the applications. What do we do, how do we do it? And they didn't have the people experienced to do it.

I went back and made two or three trips. I was there three or four days sometimes, going through some

of the people they had, giving them some instruction as to what you do first, what you do next. I just happened to be in on the first of it, that's the only thing different. Ultimately they had their own crew.

School District's Right of Condemnation

Metz: So it was very interesting. We had both these applications. What we had to do, there was property in the first place. If you want to build a school you have to get some land. We would have to go out and buy land and the school district had the rights of condemnation so we could take any three or four blocks that we needed for a school. So we did.

Dunning: So you could say that something was condemned?

Metz: Not condemned, no. It was right of condemnation. It means that if they don't want to sell to us, the federal government gave us the right to take it under certain circumstances. They called it condemning it, but condemning it to use for what it is right now so we can get those buildings off and turn around and build a school on that site. That was part of my responsibility due to the war in Richmond. They did not unify until I left Richmond and went to work for Piedmont Unified School District. I was in Richmond about thirteen years, I think. Something like that.

Selection of Sites, and Construction of Schools

Metz: What we did, we would go out down Cutting, we would go along there between Cutting and Macdonald. That's quite an area there. We would go, and there were three or four houses here, a couple of houses here. People owned lots. You had to find out who owned it and had to give them notice that we were going to occupy it and take it.

Then you had to negotiate for the property and/or property and house. You could do one of three things. You could take the house and buy a piece of property and move the house to another piece of property. Or they would have to sell the house to us. Then we had to turn around and have a house mover come along. He would have to go and find a lot someplace to move the house on so he could make some money on it. That wasn't our business. [the microphone drops]

Dunning: You were talking about the options you had for moving a house.

Metz: Yes. Some people would say, "Yes." We would have to select a site that they would be interested in. You couldn't take them down and put them down next to something else, you know. You had that type of negotiation.

Then, if they just wanted to sell it outright and take the money, then the school district had the house, so we had house movers that got together. There were four or five around this area. We would

have an auction. I handled the auctions and I had a lot of fun doing that. I got so I knew all the fellows and I knew how they reacted. They would bring their estimators along, sitting there in the Richmond school administration auditorium.

We would advertise in the paper and then we would always call these fellows, too. You had to. Legally you had to advertise that you were going to sell such and such a house someplace. If we just bought the land, that was different. So they would all come. We never opened business until after ten o'clock because they had to have a certified check for x number of dollars, depending upon the basic bid. They had to go from there up.

I had a lot of fun there. The contractors did also. I would watch, and finally I caught on. I knew. I would say, "\$3800 once," and then wait. I used to at first say, "\$3800 once." Nobody wanted it. "\$3800 twice."

I found out that these estimators were scratching around to see whether they could go another hundred or two or fifty dollars. I've had them go up \$25 and \$50 at a time. So I would wait and would know. I would watch him. These guys--pardon me. That's a very poor way of expressing it, but these contractors--the contractors would be there with them, too. They would sit there and then these estimators were doing like this with a pencil. When they stopped the pencil I knew that's as far as they were going to go at anytime. They would bid up to \$4100. I knew they weren't going to do anything.

Lots of time it would go with just two of them. Out of about six or eight there would be two of them still scratching around. The first one who put the pencil up, I thought, "This other guys got it."

I would just say, "\$4200. \$4200 once." I would wait sometimes a minute and a half, two or three minutes, let them sit there, and then they would [imitates] like that, whisper. That was part of the acquisition of the property on which we could build schools.

When we received the property and it was ours, sufficiently--I mean the area that was required for an elementary or a secondary school. Secondary is considerably more property. Then the thing we had to do was get an architect to draw the plans for it. Then we had about five or six architects all working designing buildings for different sites. That was my responsibility, to work with them plus keeping the schools going.

There were two boards, but once in a while they would need some property badly and it was going to cost about a million dollars. If the elementary district was broke, the high school district for one dollar would give them this piece of property they owned. A couple of years later the high school district was broke and the elementary district had some money. Then they would give it for one dollar, which is legal. They would give them a piece of property. That type of negotiations went on.

Dunning: It sounds like there were a lot of negotiations. I'm wondering if some of the people who owned the land protested very much about having to move?

Metz: Sometimes.

Dunning: Was that a problem?

Metz: Not too much. If it was explained properly to them-- a lot of negotiations went on.

Dunning: They basically didn't have a choice, right?

Metz: Yes, no.

Dunning: They had to leave?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: Would they get a pretty good price for the house?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: If their house was moved to another lot, who would pay for the lot? Would they have to buy the new lot, or was--?

Metz: No, we did.

Dunning: You did? You bought the land?

Metz: If we moved the house for them we had to get another location so we could put the house down there for them.

Dunning: So was there quite a bit of house moving?

Metz: Oh, yes. Funny, the house movers, I enjoyed watching some of them once in a while. Some of these houses were two stories, and had big tall chimneys. To get going down to another location on the other side of town you had to go under all these wires. They would have a heck of a time maneuvering very slowly on big, great trailers. To move it, just get it this way and this way, and they would have to get up and lift up the wires so just the tip of the roof would get under that wire.

Dunning: Do you remember the Nystrom School--?

Metz: Oh, yes. Nystrom School had been there previously. Polly went to Nystrom.

Dunning: I know that the original Nystrom family house had been moved because the school was going to go on that property, but I wasn't exactly sure when.

Metz: No, this was way back in 1918, 1920, something like that. Nystrom School had been there for a long, long time. That was one of the originals.

Dunning: Even at that point they didn't have a choice about it. They were told they had to move their house.

Metz: That's right. That's been a law for years and years, the right of condemnation. But you had to be fair about it. They could take you to court if you were going to just give them one dollar for something

that's worth \$5,000, one of those things. You had to be reasonable and it had to be negotiated. They're happy with what they're getting within whatever the limitations for the expenditure to buy it that the school district had.

We had two boards. I went to one board meeting, and I would go to the other board meeting. There were about seven members on each. I know the elementary had Perrelli from Perrelli Canning on the board.

Dunning: Which Perrelli?

Metz: Joe.

Dunning: I've done an interview with Joe Perrelli.

Metz: About my age?

Dunning: Yes. In fact, he's older than you.

Metz: I know he is. He's about eighty-five.

Dunning: Actually he's going to be eighty-seven.

Metz: Yes. Well, Joe was older. I knew he was three or four years older, yes. Joe and I got along very, very nicely. I would have to go out there and if we had to get something done in a hurry and needed the president's signature, I would run out to the cannery and give it to Joe and he would sign it.

"All right." And he would sign it. The board had already cleared it.

Dunning: Were the board members appointed or elected?

Metz: Elected. I ran the elections.

Dunning: That's probably another story, right?

Metz: Well, yes. That's something that doesn't enter into the war years at all.

Dunning: How many schools did you get built?

Metz: About thirty; I guess. I don't remember. I was going to count for you and I forgot to. I had to stop and think. I think there's twenty-five--I don't know. Really, I shouldn't answer unless I know. I had one, heck yes, El Sobrante, and El Cerrito had quite a few areas. Richmond had one. They had a Mira Vista School, and then they had an annex that they built for the influx of students. It was constructed on a hilly area requiring three different levels.

The architects were a lot of fun sometimes. We had one that wanted to have a safe in each classroom.

Dunning: A safe?

Metz: A safe, yes, with a combination, in each classroom. I used to kid him about the next time he wants gold handles on the doors. I said, "Look." I saw the plans, and I would say, "Come on." Of course, the architect, the board had their fingers in it, naturally. But I had to do some of the negotiating

along the contractual arrangements. I would look at it and I said, "What the so-and-so is this?"

"Oh, that's a safe so they can put their stuff in it, for purses and things."

I said, "I guess they're going to have to carry the purse. That's out." I put an x through it. Of course, the board had already said so. They had seen the plans. Little things like that.

I had one architect. He was really an inspector. He was really something.

Dunning: What was his name?

Metz: Charles Strothoff, from San Francisco. He was a big six foot six or almost seven feet. He weighed about two hundred pounds. He was a big man. He was an elderly person. He's passed away. He was really a toughie, and I learned a lot about what to look for in construction only through the architects.

I remember one time during inspection of a new elementary school. What the heck was the name? It was right over here in Richmond down off the hill. Anyway, we were building a school there and we went out to look and Charlie said, "All right now, don't forget, red lead around all the drains."

We came back a couple of days later and it was all painted. All done. And that was a big job. Charlie said, "Hey, did you red lead that?"

"Sure. What do you mean? It's in the contract isn't it?"

"Bring me a ladder."

"What do you want? Oh, no, everything's all right Charlie."

He got a ladder and he took a big putty knife and he started scraping all the way along. They hadn't put any red lead in it at all.

Dunning: Red lead?

Metz: That is a preservative for metal, and then you paint over it. They had to take it all off. That's just an incidence that you don't have to put down in here.

Dunning: Well, it obviously still happens today with that big phoney sprinkler systems. That's a disgrace. [refers to recent incident of contractor installing fake sprinkler systems in California public buildings.]

Metz: That's why you have to have a very good inspector, to catch all those things and know what should be done.

Dunning: Were most of the architects local?

Metz: Local, yes. We had a couple from around Oakland. We had three or four in Richmond here. Schmidts and Hardman Architects were another from Berkeley. Schmidts and Hardman had been building schools in California around this area for years and years. Of course, when they started out they had two or three of

the schools themselves here. As a matter of fact, I can tell you by the architectural arrangement if they had anything to do with a school, if they were the architects. They had the same thing in all the schools throughout the state. There was some little changes.

But that was really a rough job, trying to get these schools in areas where the population was. Then we had busing. We came along and we had to bus a lot of these people. We had the transportation department.

Dunning: That was another thing. I'm a little confused. You mentioned that you started on this particular job in '46.

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: So all these new schools went up in the post-war period?

Metz: Yes. They had temporary units that they would make a school out of wherever they could.

Dunning: But once Richmond's population kind of settled down after the war, you would decide how many schools were going to be built.

Metz: Your decision had to be made to take care of the immediate required schools, yes. That, I think, was more of a determining factor. You had them here and the children had to go to school and be educated.

We had portables. Out at Nystrom--that's down at the end. You know where it is. We had practically a whole school. There was very little playground. We had practically a whole school. There must have been ten or twelve or thirteen buildings. I forget what it was, but there was quite a few. We had some in other areas, other schools, until we were able to construct. They had these temporary buildings. They would move them around from one place to another to take care of the immediate necessity. It was very interesting and I enjoyed it very much. It was a very busy time.

Dunning: It sounds like it was a huge job.

Metz: It was, but if you sit down and do a little analyzation first, no matter what it is, if there's not enough hours to do it then you're going to have to find somebody to come along and assist in the hours that aren't available for you to do it yourself. They didn't have any trouble. They employed people to do the best they could with what they had.

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Postwar Richmond

[Interview 3: February 4, 1986] ##

Dunning: Last time you mentioned that you were so busy during the World War II period that you really didn't have a chance to think about the enormous changes that were happening in Richmond. Was there a time right after the shipyards closed that you stopped and thought, "What has happened to Richmond?"

Metz: Yes, I did in part. I was still occupied, though, directly so far as the schools were concerned then, due to the fact that we still were overpopulated for the housing that was available. Plus, there were a lot of people who wanted to get into Oakland, get someplace else, and there was no area there where they could be employed.

However, the one favorable situation was the fact that after the shipyard had closed for the construction, then there were repairs to be done for some of the fleet they have up in Suisin Bay now that were coming back. Also, the shipbuilding industry walked in and they were doing a lot of repairs on commercial cargo ships. That held some of the people there.

The rest of them, a lot of them went back home. Not, I wouldn't say, a great deal, but some of them did. Knowing there wasn't anything here they went back, but it didn't take them very long to find out that California was a Mecca. So, they did go back home, and they returned then with their families.

School Department: Use of Portable Classrooms

Metz: By that time the Housing Authority, with the assistance from the school department, was determining where the population was going to be located ultimately in order to construct schools because we were having double sessions during that period of time. We would have a morning session for school and we would have an afternoon session for schools, primarily because there were insufficient schools. It was quite a while before we were able to really take care of all the influx and get back to what we would call a normal school's day, nine to three, or whatever it was. We had early sessions, sometimes seven in the morning until noon, and then they would come at one o'clock and go through whenever: three, four, five o'clock sometimes. There was quite a bit of that.

I mentioned prior to this discussion that we had quite a lot of portable buildings. There were two or three different manufacturers that did make them. They had to get the code as best they could with what they had to work with. Raw materials were very difficult in those days to obtain because the federal

government had taken over, and if they needed anything for the war effort, even afterwards, they would get it. They properly depleted a lot of things, such as copper. They had to do a lot of substituting, but we did finally get some portables in a lot of those areas. I think I mentioned out at Nystrom.

We had two junior high schools that were completely portable until we could get the construction going to make a permanent school out of it.

Dunning: So during the actual war period there were no new schools built? It was just the portables?

Metz: During the war period, there were a few. This was 1946 when I went with the school department. From there on we were overly busy trying to get whatever we possibly could outside of taking a circus tent and trying to educate the children in an inadequate building.

Dunning: Could you describe a portable for me? Was there a typical design?

Metz: You're familiar with a regular classroom?

Dunning: Yes.

Metz: There's a door in the front and a door in the back as you go in and there's ingress and egress through either one. There's a certain amount of window space. The education code requires classrooms to have this certain specific construction areas. I mean, the

construction has to at least tie in with the education code. Not only with the state but the local housing authorities and the building department. All of them have to be part of whatever was going on as far as school construction was concerned. The state was very helpful and a lot of the building had to be changed slightly in order to take care of some of the portables.

First of all, you had to get the building. A certain Mr. A, B, C, D, they all made these buildings. Some were one way and some were another. They were kind of shabby looking things, but it didn't take them very long to get even looking shabbier occasionally, because they were temporary. They weren't supposed to be a permanent structure. We had a lot of them but it wasn't too bad.

Then, after we had completed an on site. Say you might have one part of a permanent structure. Then you would have to come along, in order to take care of five or six hundred kids, children shall I say, it was necessary that you had something here, something there, and something there.

The permanent structure that was being installed on the property, once in a while you would find an area where they could start using it. Most of the time it took a year, a year and a half by the time you go through all the ramifications in order to get the property and then you need to get the authorization, the okay from all the different departments involved. But those portables, they were fairly good buildings

as far as--Well, all they had to do was put piers down and place a building on top of it.

Dunning: Put what down?

Metz: Piers. I mean concrete foundations.

Dunning: That was a cement foundation?

Metz: Yes. So these portable building really helped considerably because with some of the people who stayed, and those who came back of course, we still had those schools pretty well filled. Most of them had their children here and they wanted to stay where their education had been started, at least some of them. Some of them came into the sixth to seventh grade. Others came into the kindergarten all the way up through high school.

Representative of the School District

Dunning: When we stopped the tape you mentioned that you were concerned that you didn't know enough about the Housing Authority because you weren't directly related. You were related to it through the schools.

Metz: Check.

Dunning: Could you tell me what your relation was?

Metz: My relationship was as a representative of both school districts, the elementary and the secondary, as I mentioned some time ago. When there was anything that the schools had to either ask questions or follow through, or hope that we would get some assistance for whatever the activity might be. Then it was the business department and the school district as a matter of fact, the board of education.

I was only representing them. There would be meetings about this and something was going on. They would have something down at one of the housing units that wasn't built right--all that type of thing which I had no jurisdiction over whatsoever. But the schools, naturally anything that had to do with the schools: overcrowding difficulty and once in a while some racial difficulties, which I had nothing to do with other than if there seemed to be something developing and I was asked what the school district could do to assist.

My responsibility was to relay that information to the board of education in detail or have a representative of whatever organization wanted some information, have them make their plea for or against, whatever the situation might be, to the boards of education, both of them. Then the decision was made at that level.

Dunning: Are there any instances of that, any cases that stand out in your mind?

Metz: No, nothing in particular, other than I said there might have been a few racial differences occasionally.

But no, there wasn't anything. It was all people that might be dissatisfied with the way things were developed. A lot of these people weren't used to Metz:having any jurisdiction over their activities. When they went to school wherever it might have been, I don't know what the relationship was there between the pupil and the parents and the school district. But here there were certain requirements, state law, et cetera.

The people didn't understand at first, and they still didn't for a long time understand that that was a law and they had to comply.

Dunning: In terms of attendance at school?

Metz: Sometimes attending. Not so much that as activity at the school.

Dunning: Like what?

Metz: Well, they were supposed to do certain courses, not only physical education and a few others that were mandatory. Music and that type of thing was selective if they wished. Of course, we had to buy a lot of instruments to take care of some of the youngsters coming up who desired to learn to play an instrument. The parents didn't understand and naturally the kids didn't.

We never did know what was going on at home around the table. We would get some rather--not knotty problems, but something that had to be taken care of and it's a nuisance. It was necessary, but I

had to stop something that I was doing to be able to take two or three days and investigate something for the school district. When I didn't do it the principals of the school had to do it and everybody else had to get in on it and try to keep things on an equal basis.

Dunning: You were a mediator, it seems.

Metz: Practically, yes. Not personally. The school district was a mediator sometimes between a lot of activities. If something came to my attention that was in my realm of responsibility, okay, I did it as best I could. Sometimes I didn't do it personally, but I would see that they were directed to the area or the person or the people who would be able to give them the answer they wanted.

I didn't have to go out personally and do a lot of this, but to oversee it I had to be doggone sure that the people who were making a squawk, if you want to call it--it was immaterial. It was insignificant, most of it. But it was just one of those things that for good public relations you had to take care of to see that it didn't develop into something that was serious.

Dunning: I can't help thinking about the possibilities of culture clashes during that period when you had Southern whites and Southern blacks and Midwesterners coming to Richmond.

Metz: Yes, yes there was. That's what I was just referring to. A lot of these little things, somebody came from

one area and another one came from another area, and they were used to doing something such and such a way, and the other ones were doing this. Well, the two of them were getting together. They had to do it together probably. Living in the Housing Authority they had to conform.

That was taken care of pretty well by the social workers and the Housing Authority. That was primarily their responsibility to see that everything went along as smoothly as possible.

It's difficult. You get somebody who comes from Louisiana and somebody who comes from Nebraska or someplace. Their language, their activities were far apart until somebody was able to sit down and collectively or individually be able to explain the facts of life. It wasn't their fault. Wherever they were from, why, that's the way they did it.

Postwar Housing

Dunning: Immediately after the war, did people get to stay in the war housing?

Metz: Yes. They were allowed to stay in it. That's something the Housing Authority would have to tell you about, if there was any rental involved subsequent to the time that the war ended. I couldn't tell you that, by golly. That's a question that never entered my mind. After the war was over, our activity was

taking care of those who were still here and those who then went home and came back again. We had to have adequate schooling facilities plus teachers and the educational equipment that was required.

Dunning: I was curious about a couple of areas. Atchison Village?

Metz: Atchison? That's down at Santa Fe, way down at the foot of Macdonald Avenue, yes.

Dunning: Was that built specifically for the war?

Metz: Yes. All of those areas were. North Richmond--

Dunning: Atchison, Nystom and Triangle Court?

Metz: All of those. That was only half of it. You had all those from Macdonald Avenue over towards the Bay running north and south, figuratively speaking. There wasn't anything in there. Those houses just went up bang, bang, bang. Then contractors came in also afterwards. These people, if they had jobs then they were able to put x number of dollars down and invest in whatever they might call home.

Dunning: Some of them seemed a lot nicer, like Atchison Village was certainly nicer than some of the two-story war houses.

Metz: Much nicer, yes. And Atchison Village, they didn't tear that down for a number of years after the war.

Dunning: The existing houses there now, aren't they the original ones?

Metz: Some. There's some of them that they demolished entirely. I don't know. That's getting back into this housing. If you can get ahold of them I think you're going to get a world of information that I can't give you because the details are what you want, what happened, when, and why.

Dunning: I was wondering about your opinion as an outsider to the Housing Authority. You were living in Richmond yet you saw all these new areas coming up. How did that affect you personally?

Metz: Nothing. That was just what you call development. Good, bad, or indifferent, but it was development and it was necessary. We had the people, and in order to take care of the population and see that everything was going along straight--that was the City's responsibility of course. It didn't affect me. Isn't that funny? None whatsoever because I wasn't directly connected with any of them. I didn't live down in that area. I lived up in the hill.

Of course, I had to go around all day. I had to go out to North Richmond. Talk about satisfying some of these people, it was awfully hard if--and we hoped, and they did do very well. If they were going to start a housing project here, if they let us know.

We insisted, and the state demanded, that whatever area was taken over for some housing, there had to be sufficient area for a school, an elementary

particularly. That came into one of the responsibilities that the Housing Authority had, but we had to work with them so if we knew there were going to be anticipated x number of children to a family, age one, two, three, whatever it might be.

Depending on the type of people who were coming and where they were coming from we finally got a pretty good idea of whether there was going to be one child or two going to school, and at what ages and groups. We had a questionnaire that we would put out to all these people from the school department so we would know how many they had available right then for us to get enough school housing for them to get their education.

There were a couple of times that it was very difficult because they didn't have the same group from the same area in the United States going into a housing unit. Some would want this, some would want this, and some would want something else. But it was all worked out. We would have some public meetings occasionally to which they were all invited.

Dunning: Who would call those meetings?

Metz: Well, if it had something to do with schools, the school district would call the meeting to let people know, "All right, now this is what our educational program is."

There was nothing to really call it for other than to educate the people to assist in their determination. If they had any reasons to ask

questions, instead of doing it individually we would get representatives of some of those areas to come in and negotiate whatever they wanted to know or whatever they wanted to have done. If we didn't do it and couldn't, then they knew right then that regardless of if it was a heck of a good idea, but terribly sorry, it's not in the education code. It's beyond our responsibility.

Richmond Politics

Dunning: Have you been involved in local politics?

Metz: [hesitates]

Dunning: We can always edit out.

Metz: I'll tell you that personally. I don't even want to put it down. I'll tell you privately and you can remember it.

Dunning: Were there particular people, powerful members of the community during that time? Politicians?

Metz: You mean prior--?

Dunning: Right during that war period, or right after. I know there was a woman mayor [Mattie Chandler] during that war period.

Metz: Yes. I don't know exactly what you're referring to. You mean politicians who were assisting in running the--

Dunning: Running the city.

Metz: I don't know.

Dunning: Or with the industry, Kaiser.

Metz: Yes, they had the normal council, people who ran for council and who were on the planning commission. The planning commission in those days was one of the areas that had a lot of responsibility. I mean, the planning commission had to be in there to see that there was sufficient services to augment the houses themselves.

So there were recreational activities in connection with the unit that was going in. That took a lot of time. You didn't just go in and say, "Here, we got ten million dollars and we're going to build some units for people to live in and a school in there."

You had to develop all those things along with it. You can't have dissatisfied people if there isn't any place for the kids to play kickball or something, you know. They had to have that, particularly in the school. They had to have enough area for hopscotch for the girls and all the other activities, and a little baseball if possible, depending upon the age of the pupils.

But, the Housing Authority, I strongly recommend that you get someone someplace, and I'll endeavor the best I can to ask some questions and find out who you might contact. The information is still available. I think that would be a great assist to you.

Best Times for Richmond

Dunning: Generally, I want to ask you what you think were some of the best times in Richmond. Did Richmond ever really have a high period in your mind?

Metz: Yes. Prior to the war. It was a very closely knit community, let's put it that way. You knew most of the people in the immediate area. Any difficulties that came up, you were able to handle it either individually or collectively. You would have some good times. We used to have a lot of fun. We would have city activities doing this, and we had parades, and God knows what else.

There was always some activity going on that came directly from the city itself. I mean the individuals. There were organizations that did a lot. There were the service clubs, and they did an awful lot in those days, and some of the fraternal organizations. Everybody knew everybody.

As soon as the war came along, though, then that just disappeared. Forget it.

Dunning: That's the impression I'm getting from talking to people that lived in Richmond before the war, that it was a real small town.

Metz: It was. And you knew Joe, Frank, and Charlie, and all the whoever it might be. The Women's City Club, they were very active in assisting and developing certain new ideas in town.

Theaters in Richmond

Dunning: Richmond also had a strong downtown.

Metz: Oh, yes, very, very strong.

Dunning: Five or six movie theaters, I 've heard.

Metz: No, we didn't have five or six. We had two. No. Five or six?

Dunning: Well, Stan Nystrom, our local historian, counted that many.

Metz: Right in town?

Dunning: Well, in Richmond. There was one in Point Richmond, too, where the Point Orient is.

Metz: Yes, yes. When you said five or six, I was trying to figure out. There was two or three that I know of. There was one right down around Fourth or Fifth

Street. Then there was two others. You said five or six and I thought, "Gee gosh, I can't remember any five or six." It would be out in the boondocks someplace.

Anyway, yes, we had the movies. The one down on Sixth Street, I used to have a lot of fun there because the weekends they always had special types of movies. Of course, before audio came out I played in the orchestra. I was going to high school when I was doing it. Then the barber was the trumpet player, the clothier was a fiddler, a violin player, and the post office man was on piano, and the Standard Oil fellow was the drums. We had about five or six pieces.

This is funny. Sometimes they had music for the show, but lots of times they didn't. So the leader would go down and get a preview of what was going on so we developed the music accordingly. In the old days, when it would be the train robbers and the Indians were coming along, we would go [imitates hurried beat]. Then, good God, if somebody was dying we had [imitates slow melodramatic beat]. We had all those down pretty pat so whatever the movie came along. They all did it. Of course, in the big ones, now that was different.

Dunning: What was the name of this particular theater on Sixth Street?

Metz: I don't remember the name of it.

Dunning: You did that a lot of weekends?

Metz: It wasn't every weekend. This wasn't steady, but yes, we went down and we chased the Indians away from the stagecoach. That's way back. I'm talking about the twenties. That's before the war came along. That was what I'm talking about.

Pre-War Recollections

Dunning: I did ask about the best times, and that seems to be favorable in your memories.

Metz: Oh, yes. You want to shut that off a minute?

Dunning: No. Do I have to?

Metz: Now this I don't mind because you're talking about politics. Well, the first time I ever voted all my friends were all Republicans. Okay, so I've voted Republican ever since. Although I vote for the man after I got old enough to know whether somebody is capable in my book of handling whatever the situation might be.

When I was in school, I was responsible for all the elections. That was just normal. You would be down there until four o'clock in the morning counting the ballots. But this one was Mr. Downer from Mechanics Bank. He was with about four or five other staunch citizens. There was Joseph Perrelli of the Filice and Perrelli Canneries; a representative from Standard Oil and Standard Sanitary.

Dunning: Were they Republicans?

Metz: Some Democrats and some Republicans, but this was primarily Republican. I was chairman for the Young Republicans in the Hoover-Roosevelt election. I know very well the old boys knew they weren't going to make it, so they got the young Republicans to handle the publicity. I was one of them.

Eddie Downer was number one. Then another big wheel in town, his son was in on it. Me, I came along, so I was the chairman to have a parade the night before the election. Geez, we went to town. We had a real parade, though. We had bands and all this kind of stuff. Well, it didn't take very long after the next day. They didn't even get enough votes--I mean the whole country I'm talking about. But here, that was my introduction into the political arena.

It was fun. Here we were, excited young guys, you know, gung ho. The next day our chins were down about this far. That's what I say. We did have parades though. They did all kinds of things like that initially before the town grew up.

Parchester Village

Dunning: I would like to hear that story about the Parchester Village.

Metz: As I've mentioned, and you have on your tape several places there, the school elementary district, was responsible for putting buildings here and the proper Metz-type of educational facilities, whatever they might be. So there was a group in Parchester that wanted a school in lieu of going double session at Nystrom. All the portable buildings, some were adequate and some were just barely adequate, naturally. They wanted a school out in their own area out in Parchester Village.

So they came to the board and requested it. The board acquiesced and they purchased the property, the board did, secured the architect to make the design for the school. These people [Parchester residents] were invited to come in and go through with the architect certain aspects of their building and whatever they might ask to be incorporated in the construction area so they wouldn't come back later and say, "Well, this isn't the way I thought it was going to be."

So that gave us some input as to what we were going to have to be responsible for. That was fine. So we bought the property--

Dunning: Where was the property?

Metz: In Parchester. It wasn't completed. So we were getting ready to put the contract out, the bid for the school. Somehow or other, I don't know and I never heard, there was a dissident group out there that came to the board and did not want the school placed there.

Dunning: Were they from Parchester Village?

Metz: Parchester, all of it. Yes, this whole area included the population of Parchester. To our surprise, this dissident group came in and vehemently said that that was going to be a completely black school and there would be no integration--busing of white or other nationality pupils to the new school. The net result was that somehow or other the two groups couldn't get together and we had to stop construction, stop all the activities in connection with it.

Finally the board was pushed into the area where either they had to insist on the school being there or allow the people who seemingly had the--and I presume some of those that wanted it in the first place might have been coerced into saying no. For what reason, that was their responsibility. So we stopped the whole idea of putting a school there.

We then put a few more portable units at Nystrom and transferred some of the kids who were at Nystrom to Grant School and a few areas around there. That was rather a peculiar time, really, for all of us, because here we had gone through all that trouble. It wasn't trouble, it was responsibility. Then it was all just thrown down the drain.

Dunning: So there was a lot of dissension within the black community?

Metz: Yes, evidently. Nobody knows what happened, but there must have been or there wouldn't have been a complete

change of heart whether they wanted to have it or not. It was just a big surprise, that's all.

Influence of Churches

Dunning: I'm curious as to the power of the churches. They're the ones that initiated this school?

Metz: Well, I don't know. You have to have leadership, and the leadership was initially, I think, started by the churches. They had quite a few churches out there. I think it was mostly those people who had the opportunity to get to the public to discuss whether they were going to have a school, not a school, or whether they were going to do this, or whether there was some area they felt should be cleaned up or Metz:whatever it might be. I think that those were the leaders. I don't know. We never did know. You don't know. It goes on in a private area. But somebody had to be, and I know that some of those ministers or preachers were on the committees that came in to discuss certain aspects of activities going on in Parchester.

I would assume that it would be those people that initiated it and then somewhere along the line--I don't remember right now if the same ones came in and changed their mind or not. But I know we had it down all ready to go and then the board decided not to.

Dunning: I had heard a little bit of the story from this older black resident whom I had interviewed, and he was against Parchester Village because he felt it promoted segregation. Yet still, a lot of residents of Parchester Village feel there's real strength in that, and it's still predominantly black.

Metz: Yes. Well, I feel that that was one of the issues that didn't materialize until they got going and they felt that they were a separated entity and didn't have any part of the activity of the community at all. I don't know. Naturally I wasn't in on the secret things that were going on anywhere. You never knew. I don't think even some of the people who were responsible for making decisions in Richmond knew what was behind a lot of it.

It was just an individual area out there that felt that that's what they wanted. Some wanted integration. Some didn't. They wanted to be independent, which was all right. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that. But it made it very difficult to make a final decision on a lot of things that had nothing to do particularly with them.

Metz: I know that we had a heck of a time down at Nystrom and down on the other side of the Santa Fe tracks because the buildings, high tide would come up and it made it very difficult as far as the drainage for sewage and everything else that was concerned. Every once in a while a really high tide would come along and the city had some difficulties trying to take care of the situation out there, the city street department and health department. It was rough. High tide

there, that was--and even at Nystrom. They had to close the school down, I think, once.

Dunning: All the way at Nystrom?

Metz: Yes, up that far. Well, I mean it's backing up all the way. High tide, in the old days areas down there were just water. In the wintertime with the rains and then the high tides, that was it, I'm telling you.

So you see, all the little things like that have the bearing on the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of your living quarters, too. That might have been a contributing factor for some of the people who didn't like this or didn't like that.

Postwar Decline of Downtown Richmond

Dunning: I've asked you about some of the best times in Richmond and it seems to me you focused on that pre-World War II period. On the opposite, what do you think have been Richmond's worst times in your opinion?

Metz: Well, Richmond itself, downtown, I don't know. It was after the war that the city seemed to start to slightly disintegrate as far as what it was prior to the war--and I mean the industry, the industry was still there, what there was. But the stores they would drop out. This shoe store would go, and this would go, and a clothing store would go, and the

jewelry store would go. There was a jeweler right next to the theater, I know. Then the real estate offices, they started moving out past Twenty-third Street because whatever it was, downtown just kind of went to pot.

Dunning: What decade are we talking about--I know redevelopment went on in the sixties, but are we talking about the fifties that it started?

Metz: Yes, right after the war, but not to a great extent. God, it had some nice stores downtown, and there was no activity. People weren't buying. Or if they were buying, they wanted the least expensive, which is all right if they only could spend a dollar. But then they go into Berkeley and they go into Oakland and places like that a lot of times.

So the town just seemed to go to pieces. And it is now. A lot of the dentist's offices downtown, they went, and the American Trust Bank--that was on the corner of Tenth and Macdonald--they moved out. The whole thing was just an exodus from there. Some of the businesses moved up Twenty-third Street towards San Pablo. Then that didn't develop as well as they had anticipated. It's very difficult to maintain a municipality like that if you don't have input. Seemingly there was all outgo. There wasn't anything.

They tried. Now, of course, they're trying and trying. Richmond's been trying for years to build back up again, but you're going to have to build it a little farther out if you're going to do it at all.

Dunning: It really hasn't taken off yet.

Metz: No. I doubt whether it ever will, personally. It might, but since there isn't anything downtown, where is downtown?

Dunning: Well, wasn't Hilltop Mall supposed to be downtown? Instead of rejuvenating the shops downtown, the activity was moved out to Hilltop.

Metz: I think so, probably.

Dunning: That really made a big difference.

Metz: Yes, that made a lot of difference.

Dunning: Because that's far out. Most Richmond people I've talked to, they don't go to Hilltop. You can shop for clothes but you really can't go to the drugstore or do your grocery shopping.

Metz: I haven't been downtown in Richmond for fifteen or twenty years.

Dunning: That's amazing.

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: When did you move out?

Metz: I moved out just before I retired. I stayed at Piedmont one year and then I retired and moved out here.

Dunning: You've been in Rodeo for fifteen years?

Metz: Fifteen years, yes.

Dunning: So you basically stayed in Richmond until the early seventies?

Metz: I was there forty years.

Dunning: What made you move from Richmond to Rodeo?

Metz: It had nothing to do with Richmond. Nothing at all. My wife and I wanted to move and that was the plan. I'll tell you later. That's a personal thing.

Richmond's Historical Side

Dunning: Do you see Richmond as an historical place?

Metz: In a way, yes, because Richmond started way back years ago, about 1905. It started way over at Point Richmond. There wasn't anything as Richmond per se as you know it, no. It just started there with the Point. The Santa Fe was the primary activity.

Dunning: And the Standard Oil.

Metz: And the Standard Oil, yes, moved in. From there on out, why Richmond improved and improved, and grew, and grew, and grew until what it is today. It's like anything else. You either get a trumpet and you take

your turn around and down come the walls if you blow hard enough.

Dunning: What do you think Richmond should be remembered for?

Metz: About the only thing that Richmond would be remembered for at this time--two things. The initial Richmond, way back before its development, on its own through Santa Fe and the Standard Oil and that area, because that was pioneer area.

Then I think Richmond should be given a lot of--what do I want to say--credence for having the shipyard here and the development and the ability for a small community to take on a horrendous influx of population

Metz: and activity and transportation in and out and schooling. The first part is incidental. That's in any area.

But I think that Richmond, for the way it handled the situation, and it was a rough one during those war years, I think that they should be given a lot of credit, the old fathers or whatever. Here it came and they hadn't had an opportunity to have heard of anything like that before or been responsible for it.

So I think that that's an era that Richmond should be given a lot of credit for being able to handle that type of situation and with the results that ultimately they accomplished. That's just my personal opinion, of course. But those are the two

things that I think Richmond should be given a lot of credit for.

Dunning: Do you have any opinions or solutions for Richmond's image problem?

Metz: No, I don't, and I've never given it any thought, naturally, not being identified as a resident there now. But I think that whatever occurred that made Richmond so depleted of buildings and industry other than what's there now. It's like I mentioned a while ago. Offices and stores and shops, they're all gone. I don't know whether Richmond will ever be able to get back again. They try, but I think that the pattern has been pretty well established. Maybe not. I hope, but I don't see any. Maybe some people might have an idea. I don't have one for it.

Dunning: I always ask people.

Metz: How many different opinions do you have?

Dunning: It's interesting. I would say from most of the people I've talked to it's the disintegration of downtown that's hit them the hardest. It wasn't the wartime influx of people or anything.

Metz: Yes. We'll go into that in a minute [whispered].

Dunning: Richmond doesn't really have a center.

Metz: No, no there isn't.

Dunning: That's hard.

Metz: Yes. You said a center. Well, there is no actual center. It's disintegrated to a piece here and here, and there's no real wheel. There's no hub for the wheel in other words. It's just nothing. It's too bad.

Dunning: I wonder how the new developments like Marina Bay and Brickyard Landing are going to go over?

Metz: I think those might be somewhat of a progress. I don't know whether it's going to be a permanent situation or not because there's not much area there to develop. Housing, yes, but there's no place for many shops or anything like that there. It might, but I think Richmond has had it.

Closing Remarks

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Metz: I do want to say that I am going to follow through on some of this housing area for you. I'm interested in this project that you're trying to promote and complete. It's not an easy thing to do. You have to find people who are willing to assist, and even then sometimes--maybe some of them have stopped in the middle of it and made no further progress, or no compendo. You know.

I certainly want to compliment you. I want to compliment you on your ability, your wonderful way of asking the proper questions to get the information that you desire. It's an experience that few people have and are able to take in their stride and complete. I'm quite sure that when you've completed with this you should have been given a lot of kudos for the wonderful work that you've done and all the people that you've been involved with. Some probably were pros, some were cons, God knows what, but nevertheless, you're sincere, and when you're finished with this, if there's anything, I would like to write a little letter complimenting you on your ability to complete the project.

Dunning: Well, thank you. I've never been so complimented on a tape before.

Metz: Oh come on!

Dunning: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, and one thing that makes a project like this work, is that the individuals get involved. That's really kept it rolling.

Metz: You have that ability that a lot of people would never have. You just know it and how to do it. That's why.

Dunning: May I ask you one final question?

Metz: Certainly. How far is up? You know the answer to that: as long as a piece of string.

Dunning: Do you have any special ambitions for yourself now, things that you would like to do or places that you would like to go?

Metz: No. I think that what I've accomplished--I'm not completely satisfied with what I've done so far, but no, there isn't anything that I think I--for instance, somebody said, "Why don't you take a trip to Europe."

I'm not interested in going to Europe. I liked Canada. I've been there. I've been to Cuba. I was in Cuba six months before Castro took over. That was interesting. No, I'm not interested in this travel business.

I've been to Japan. I've been to the Orient with the Rotary International. No, I'm getting to the age now that where there's certain activities that I would like to do but I physically can't do it.

Dunning: You still go up to Reno though.

Metz: Oh, definitely. I go to Reno with the Rotary Club. My wife and I used to go once a month, go up and stay a couple of days, but I don't like to drive that much anymore. Not that I can't, but it's--and I go by myself. It's no fun just going by yourself on a junket like that. If you go with the Rotary Club, that's fine, or if somebody else wants to go I'll go up with them.

Dunning: You've got a beautiful house.

Metz: Well, it's a home.

Dunning: It's the neatest house I've ever seen in my life.

Metz: Oh, come on. Anyway, I guess I'm supposed to be--what do they say? I can't think of the word right now. I'm meticulous.

Metz: Oh. I don't know. If I see something that needs to be done I want to get in and get it completed. I don't like to have stuff over here and something over here. You said something about being neat. All right. If I find something that looks like it's out of place or out of order or something, I'll go. But that isn't an activity that you consider as really necessary. It's just something that's innate in a person if you're built that way. And I'm secretary of the Rotary Club. That's an activity that keeps me reasonably busy.

Dunning: You have a beautiful orchid collection, too.

Metz: That started about 1946. Somebody gave me one orchid, a cymbidium. I went down and bought a couple more at five dollars or six dollars. They're twenty dollars now if you look at one. But I would buy them, so finally I had about ten or fifteen.

Then I got interested so I got some books and read about it and I asked florists. They don't know too much about them anyway, so I got some books and I read about orchids, what you should and shouldn't do, and I still don't know enough about orchid culture to be sure of what I'm doing. Also, they would multiply, and you repot them. Of course, I spent some money on

a lot of them, too, because I would see one I wanted, and it was fifteen dollars or something like that. That was a lot of money.

I had about four hundred and fifty, five hundred out here, but we had what they call a hoar frost. It's a heavy frost, and it just killed everything for three days. These orchids outside, I lost about a hundred and twenty or thirty of them.

Dunning: That would make you cry.

Metz: Did you ever get ahold of a potato that's mushy, just squeeze it? These are bulbs. These outside have bulbs like that. They just went to pot. All gone. Now I had to repot a lot of them. I just don't get a chance to get out now and do the things I used to with the orchids. I'm going to hope in the spring that I can set up a table out there so I can repot another fifty or seventy-five at least. They need it.

But it's an activity. As a matter of fact, it makes me kind of sick once in a while that I haven't done or couldn't get out and do some of the things that I would like to with the orchids. But if you can't, you can't. Just forget it.

Dunning: Well, if at a later time anything comes to your mind, any recollections and memories, please feel free to call me.

Metz: I shall. I have your number.

Dunning: I would be happy to add.

Metz: Yes. I would like to. I can ask some specific questions on some of the things that you brought up that I'm not familiar with. I'll see if I can find someone and ask the question and if they're interested in giving you the privilege of asking the questions. If not, then if I can ask the questions from my viewpoint and get an answer that might be satisfactory to you, then I'll try to do that, too.

Dunning: Also I would like to get your trombone playing on tape, too, at some point, and take your picture.

Metz: Oh come on, no. When are you going to do that?

Dunning: Well, today's a nice day.

Metz: Where's your camera?

Dunning: In my backpack.

Metz: I'll be damned. Well, listen, I don't look--

Dunning: Well, we could do it another time. I want to thank you. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience. It really helped.

Metz: It's just been a pleasure for me, too. I haven't had a chance to do a heck of a lot of research, though, on some of the things I might have been able to assist on to a greater degree than I have. I will though. I mean, seriously, if I can do any of this for you I'll be very pleased to. It will be a pleasure.

Dunning: And if going through your records you find any important photograph or something I could always make a copy.

Metz: The only thing I had a photograph of is the Ordnance Department at the Ford Plant that I showed you which started out with about five or six. There must have been about fifty in that picture, I guess. That was over a period of time.

Dunning: Thank you very much.

Metz: It's been my pleasure, and I sincerely hope that you get--how long do you think it's going to take for you to complete this? Another year?

Dunning: I'll be working on it for the next year. I have some funding for approximately the next year.

Metz: That's nice.

[Interview ended and Mr. Metz gave me a tour of his orchid collection. In his garden, he played some 1940s songs on the trombone while I photographed him and enjoyed the music. It was a delightful way to close our session. --Judith Dunning] ##



Clifford Metz
1986

Photograph by Judith K. Dunning

Family Background and Early Work Experiences

[Interview 1: January 22, 1986] ##

Dunning: Where were you born?

Metz: Madera, California.

Dunning: What year?

Metz: 1904, October.

Dunning: What about your parents, where were they born?

Metz: That's a question that I am unable to answer; I never did find out. I think that my mother's folks probably came from Australia. I don't know. My father was born someplace, I understand, in Illinois. My father and mother were divorced when I was very early, and my family background is something that is almost nebulous.

Dunning: But your mother's side was Australian?

Metz: I think so. Of course, instead of saying, "Boat," she said, "Bewt." An Indian lady was a very personal friend of my mother's. My mother lived in King's

Canyon Park, in Grant's Grove, and I lived up there for a long time.

I went to school at Squaw Valley in Dunlap. That's not the Squaw Valley at Tahoe. There were about eleven Indians and four white kids in one school room. In the winter we rode horseback to school. It was about four or five miles.

Then my father went to Fresno, finally. So I would have to spend six months with one and six months with another.

Dunning: So you were in joint custody even before it was in style?

Metz: Oh, yes. In the wintertime I would go up there and have ten or twelve feet of snow all around it. It was a large two, three-room cabin.

My mother lived there until two years before she passed away. I made her come down here. She didn't like to come down here. She said she always got a cold. As soon as she came down--that was in Richmond--the next morning the whole house smelled like Vick's Vapor Rub. She had it all over her and all over everything.

She wouldn't come down after that Christmas, or anytime, for years. But the last two years she was unable to hack it by herself. She lived all alone up there.

Dunning: How old was she when she died?

Metz: Ninety.

Dunning: You have longevity in your family.

Metz: Yes. I'm eighty-one, actually. I'm still raising heck.

Dunning: Did you have other sisters and brothers?

Metz: I had one sister who lived to be two years old. Way back.

Dunning: So you were basically an only child?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: Can you describe your mother for me? You've told me a little bit about her.

Metz: She was up to my shoulder.

Dunning: Which would be about how tall?

Metz: I'm five foot four and a half, and she was four foot ten or eleven. I don't think she weighed over a hundred pounds. Very lively. Her cabin was half a mile from the ranger's headquarters. In the wintertime she skied over there to get her mail, and skied back. In the old days, though, we had to make our own skis. We made them out of barrel staves.

 They were round. Or else the Indians would make them out of birch or something, I think. Then we

would make our own webs. Those are snowshoes. That's the way I used to travel around all the time.

Dunning: So that was second nature to you?

Metz: Yes. I don't like to go in the snow.

Dunning: You had enough as a child?

Metz: Yes. Snow doesn't interest me one bit. You can keep it. [laughs] You have to get in and out of it for a few years, that's enough.

Dunning: How about your father, do you have recollections of him?

Metz: Not too much. What the heck did he do? He did quite a few things. He was an expert carpenter. Then they had some cattle up there. He and another fellow had cattle up about four thousand feet. Then he got out of that so he left and went down to Fresno. Then he was in charge of some kind of a mill down there. He was superintendent finally. I guess he was an excellent carpenter.

Then he and his brother, an uncle of mine--I never saw much of him but maybe two or three times. They decided they wanted to go in the trucking business. They didn't know anything about trucks. [laughs] But that's all right; a venture is a venture.

Dunning: You mentioned that, as far as you know, your father came from Illinois.

Metz: That's right.

Dunning: Did you ever hear any family stories of what brought your family to California?

Metz: No. I haven't the slightest idea. My mother was rather peculiar. I would ask her questions and she would start to answer and she would say, "And that's that." That was all. She didn't talk a lot.

Dunning: She didn't want to talk about it?

Metz: She wouldn't talk about anything. I would ask her all kinds of things about my grandfather. I never saw my grandfather or grandmother. "Well," she said, "They were kind of funny people, the same as I am. And that's that."

"Jeez," I said, "What do you mean, 'That's that'?"

"That is that!"

Oh brother. I learned that when she says, "That is that," that's that. I never did find out anything.

As I was going to say, a very personal friend of hers was an Indian lady. She married one of the assistant superintendents of the park service. He was in charge of fires and all that. She lived right within from this house to that, probably, as close to my mother's. They had the only two cabins that were up around there in that area for a while. After my

mother passed away I went up to kind of take charge of things, so I knew her very well. I would ask her some question.

"Oh," she said, "Didn't you know that? Oh. No, Doris--that was my mother's name--told me all about this."

I learned more from her than I ever learned from my mother about my mother's background, and a few other things.

Dunning: Any things that stand out in your mind that the Indian woman told you?

Metz: Nothing particular, I would say, about my background. And yes, she was probably born here in the United States.

Dunning: Your mother?

Metz: I presume. She said something about how she and this Indian lady spent about two years trying to locate where my mother's father and mother were buried. They were supposed to be up in the Indian territory up there someplace. I think they finally found it. I don't know.

But I asked mother. She said, "Oh, yes. We looked and looked and looked, but we never were sure of anything." That was all I would ever get out of her. So I just gave up.

I thought, "To Hell with it." I didn't care anymore. I just didn't ask anymore questions. I just thought, "Well, start in from scratch."

Dunning: Did you ever have any theories yourself, and ideas of where, what brought them here?

Metz: Theories? No, I gave up. No, never. I just gave up on the whole thing. I just blanked it up. I wasn't stubborn. I said, "What the hell. If they ain't going to do it, they ain't going to do it."

Dunning: You mentioned that you learned how to make the snowshoes from the Indians. Are there any other things that stand out in your mind, any traditions that you think you learned that a child around here wouldn't?

Metz: Oh, yes. You learn for instance in many ways--nothing specific--but you learn how to take care of yourself. You're an independent individual. If you don't, nobody else is going to do it for you. That's not true per se, but I mean you just learn. Okay, this has to be done, all right, how do I do it? It's trial and error. Sometimes you erred, but next time maybe you made it.

I don't know, but it was just little things like that that kids here don't get. I rode horseback all the time. I had to take care of my own horse, believe me. In the wintertime, if the horse got a cold you had to take your sack out there and put creosote in it and put paper down in the bottom of it to start the creosote so the horse could go [sniffs] and clear his

head. Yes, those things, these kids wouldn't know anything about it.

Dunning: Did you have any household chores?

Metz: Yes. For about two years I lived with an aunt outside of Fresno. There I learned how to milk a cow and slop the pigs.

Then I had the job the year and a half that I was there, back and forth, back and forth. They had what they called a separator. You put the milk in there and then you start to gear down. You sat there and ground this thing and the gears went blub, blub, blub. You would get butter, then you would get cream, then you would get milk, and then you would get whey. The whey you slopped the pigs, and some of the milk. These people were sending the milk to twenty-five gallon or fifty gallon cans, big milk cans. They would come around and pick it up and I had nothing to do with that.

Dunning: Your childhood was rural, that's for sure.

Metz: Yes, yes.

Dunning: When would you see your father during this time?

Metz: Generally--not always--sometimes I would be eight months with my father and then four months with my mother, or six months. It wasn't anything directly.

It depended on what the hell they wanted to do where I had to go. I had no jurisdiction over that until I got old enough that I was getting tired of it.

Dunning: Was that difficult for you to be uprooted?

Metz: Yes. I went to the school up there with the Indians. That was all right. But when I got about the third grade they went to Fresno.

Dunning: Your mother did?

Metz: Yes. Then my father stayed up there. Then my father came down to Berkeley, or Oakland. So I would go to school in Fresno and after I got through with the third or fourth grade, I had gone up to about the fifth or sixth grade. Then when you start in conjugating sentences and learning a little about math.

I left Fresno and went to Berkeley. Jesus, in Berkeley they had conjugated sentences for a whole semester. I got back to Fresno--they were just starting it. Nothing else for me to do but sit and listen to it, because I had heard it. Then, when I went back to Berkeley, they were ahead of that.

So I was always about six months behind. I never did learn to conjugate a sentence.

But one thing, I did have to be very careful when I left Grant's Pass, King's Canyon. I mean up in the mountains. When I was young they had for seventy-

five years prior to that time cut the trees and all the redwoods. There was logging.

My conversation, certainly, wasn't English. I'm telling you, I don't think there was any word that anyone in any vocation could ever say that I didn't know. So I came down to Berkeley and I started telling somebody off. I mean, what the hell is a gangster doing here from Chicago. I had to be very careful. I had to learn how to speak somewhat like an English person would. I'm still having difficulty occasionally.

Dunning: It comes back to you?

Metz: Yes. Every once in a while I get excited about something and I'll lay into it. Pardon me, you'll want some--

Dunning: No, this is fine. This is part of your background.

Metz: Well, you want to know, I presume. We'll have to do some more of this, I presume, because you're not going to get it all done today.

Dunning: No, we'll do one session today. Was it unusual for people to be divorced during that time? That was soon after the turn of the century.

Metz: No, that was looked down upon. At that time, yes, about 1910, you married for what it was worth and you took it and liked it. If you didn't like it it was too bad. My approach was always that.

They didn't marry so well. That's just one of those things. Then they got married and good gosh, they did not like this. The guy did this or this lady did this; to heck with them, they would go get rid of them. So that just bothered me, and it still does. Actually, I wasn't grown up that way.

Dunning: Did either of your parents remarry?

Metz: My mother. Three times.

Dunning: Three times?

Metz: Yes. She was quite a gal, I guess.

Dunning: Did you get to know your stepfathers?

Metz: Oh, yes, I got to know them. The last one was the assistant superintendent on the road that went into King's Canyon way back. I don't know whether you're familiar with the area or not. You go up to Grant's Grove, then you go from there over to Yuma, then you go from there down to Cedar Grove. Well, from there on, even getting into Cedar Grove down there, that's eight years they had convicts.

I usually would get up there. Sometimes my wife and I used to go up in February for a vacation for a week or two. I get to go down with this--Fillmore was his name. He was very nice, a charming guy. He was assistant superintendent when they had three or four hundred convicts. It was all hand labor. They built that road clear down like this with the rocks up there a hundred and fifty feet.

I would go up in the summertime once in a while. Before that road was in you went on the other side of the King's river and you went around a little trail that went like this. I'm scared to death of heights.

I would go fishing. I love to trout fish. I haven't been fishing or hunting. I used to belong to a duck club. I haven't done any of that for quite a few years. I'll tell you about how come; my back went out.

Dunning: So your mother married three times?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: How about your father?

Metz: No, never.

Dunning: Never again.

Metz: [laughs] My mother was quite a babe.

Dunning: Do you feel there were certain things that she tried to hand down to you in terms of attitudes or ideas?

Metz: No. She might have, but nothing specific. I learned to be an observer.

Dunning: You must have become very adaptable, too, as a child, just adapting to all your stepfathers, and then--

Metz: Well, I had to. Either that or you're out on the front steps waiting for the door to open. So you learn. You don't pay much attention to what goes on after a while. You just take it for what it's worth and do some private thinking is all. I'm sure holding you up on a bunch of yakking here.

Dunning: Oh, no. You mentioned when you were in grammar school you were between Fresno and Berkeley.

Metz: Yes, and the same thing in what they called freshmen in those days in high school, which is the ninth grade. That was in Oakland with my father. So then I didn't see my mother for one whole semester, practically. Maybe a little vacation. But then I went to Oakland High School. In the meantime I took violin lessons off and on for about six or seven years and I hated the instrument. I didn't like it at all.

Dunning: How did you happen to get into violin?

Metz: When I was living with my father, he finally had an apartment on Twenty-second between Grove and Telegraph. Do you know the Saint Francis de Sales Catholic church?

Dunning: Yes.

Metz: Well, it was just around the corner, and the YMCA was down there. I'll get to that after a while. When I went into high school I went to Oakland High. So I was told, "Well, you're musically inclined, why don't you try the band?"

In those days they didn't have American football. It was rugby. With me, 120 pounds, I didn't play varsity for the guys. I learned to play rugby and I was on the track team.

Then I decided, "To hell with this." I took up banjo. They had a little funny band that about six or eight guys got together. A banjo and a trumpet and the drums and junk like that. We played "Yankee Doodle". Then the music instructor said, "Would you like to be in the band?"

I said, "No."

He said, "Well, we need someone badly. Badly."

I said, "Yes? Why?"

"Well," he said, "we don't have a tuba player. I don't think you would have any trouble."

I said, "Okay." So I stayed after school and learned how to play the tuba.

Dunning: So you went from the violin to the banjo--?

Metz: Yes, but the banjo I stayed with. But the tuba, that was fine. Then I had an aunt out here, my father's sister. The name was Plate. You've probably run into that from the old days in Richmond. He was in the real estate business and he made money like--

Dunning: In Richmond?

Metz: Yes. So I told my father, "This is for the birds." I said, "I'm going to go someplace."

"Oh," he said.

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do." I couldn't tell him because they had jurisdiction over me at that age.

Dunning: You were still under eighteen?

Metz: Oh, yes. He said, "All right, you're going out to Ruby's."

Dunning: Excuse me?

Metz: He's going out to my aunt's, or his sister's Ruby. I said, "Okay." Well, I got out there. Of course, where I came from, and I still hadn't gotten over how to swear at every other word.

They were overly religious Presbyterians. Sunday morning you went to Sunday school. Then you went to church. In the afternoon you went home to lunch--dinner they called it in those days. Supper came later. Then you had an afternoon of singing with the piano, just the immediate family. They had one kid. Then you went to Christian endeavor.

By the way, I sang in a choir. Evidently I had a pretty good voice. I don't know. Then you go to this Christian endeavor. It was all young people. Then you sang in a choir and went to church Sunday night.

Monday was semi-free. But Tuesday nights were one thing. Wednesday night was prayer meeting. Thursday night was choir practice. Friday night you had to go to Christian endeavor. Saturday I played with a banjo and a trombone. That's a long story.

When I came out to Richmond--okay, good God. They had about twenty musicians. There were six hundred in the high school. There was about four hundred girls and two hundred boys.

Dunning: When?

Metz: 1920, '21. There wasn't a high school then. It was what turned into be Longfellow Junior High School. That was right off of Twenty-third Street and Macdonald.

Dunning: That seems like a really large class. I didn't think that there were so many.

Metz: Yes, there was a bunch.

Dunning: Was that ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades?

Metz: Yes. Well, they came from Pinole and Hercules, Rodeo, and back from--

Dunning: El Sobrante?

Metz: Yes, all over. El Sobrante wasn't much, but they also came from El Cerrito.

Dunning: It was a regional high school.

Metz: Yes. That was it.

Dunning: So the reason you came to Richmond was because of your aunt?

Metz: Because my father insisted that I go there. I didn't see my mother for practically--only little vacations. I stayed there. I kept playing the tuba, then the baritone player graduated so I took up the baritone. Then one of the trumpet players graduated, so I played that, and I said, "I don't like the damned thing."

Then they had what they call an alto, the french horn type thing. You know, [imitates noise of horn]. That didn't satisfy me because I was used to playing a melody, and who wants to say [imitates noise of horn again]. I told the guy, "Nuts."

So the last six months before I graduated in 1923, the trombone player graduated. They only had one. He came by to me and he said, "Hey, I want you to play trombone."

I said, "Oh nuts. Okay." Oh, and in the middle of it they wanted me to play bassoon. The damn thing sticks down about this far. I brought it back the next day and said, "This is yours. Get somebody else to do it." [laughs]. I was just raising hell.

Also, we belonged to what they called the California High School Cadets. That's ROTC. We had

to buy our own uniforms, our own pants, our own jackets. They had six companies.

Anyway, the band was one company. We were the small one; I think we had about twenty in our own tent. When we go to Leona Heights for two weeks training under the army.

Anyway, the net was that I took up this trombone and I liked it. I worked like the dickens trying to find how to play that thing.

But the year before that I worked--I didn't have much chance to do hardly anything because they allowed me to go to school. Oh, I left my aunt.

Dunning: You left Ruby Plate?

Metz: Ruby Plate. To hell with them. I had had that. I got enough religion. I'm pretty good at the bible though. These people came by the house and said, "Are you going to be saved?"

I said, "Yes."

They started quoting a section. Well, I taught Sunday school. I'll tell you why I didn't continue teaching; because I was an instrument of the devil. On Saturday nights I played for dances. That's how religious they were. Well, you know me. You're not going to tie me down with a chain.

Anyway, I moved out. I got a job out at Certainteed. That was where they make roofing. They allowed me to come to school. Then I moved. But I was playing at that time on Saturdays and maybe Sundays, so I figured to hell with it. I got \$13 a month for a room at the YMCA in Oakland.

Dunning: You went to the Y?

Metz: Yes, from Ruby's.

Dunning: So you moved from Richmond to Oakland, but you were still going to Richmond High?

Metz: Richmond High, yes. So the dean and the principal allowed me to come to school at seven in the morning, go straight through, then leave. So at seven o'clock in the morning I had a study period. Then I worked at the Certainteed from two to ten.

Dunning: That's a long day.

Metz: Yes. All I did, I finally made foreman, by gosh, after the first year, or a year and a half.

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Dunning: Was that your first paid job at Certainteed?

Metz: Yes.

Dunning: Do you remember what your salary was?

Metz: Around five dollars a day. I don't know exactly what it was.

Dunning: So you would leave the YMCA in Oakland and go to school in Richmond from seven to one, then work from two to ten. Then you would have to go back to Oakland?

Metz: To Oakland.

Dunning: And you did that for how long?

Metz: Two years. Oh, about a year and a half, I guess, because then my music was coming into the picture considerably and I was playing for--ultimately I played in San Francisco when I was a senior in high school. I played in San Francisco for some of the theaters.

Dunning: You played the trombone?

Metz: Yes. I played the trombone. Then I had to play violin along with it.

Dunning: That's quite an independent teenager. I mean, supporting yourself.

Metz: Yes, I was. The last year in high school I played at Tates, the beach, way out there, years ago. When I was going to high school, living in Oakland, I had to get a streetcar to get from Certainteed, walk up to the Santa Fe tracks over to the end of what they called the dinky.

Dunning: What was the dinky?

Metz: It was a one-man streetcar, a little thing. I would get on that and then transfer to the big one that went all the way down Macdonald Avenue, San Pablo Avenue, all the way into Oakland.

Dunning: That would take quite a while.

Metz: Yes, it took about forty-five minutes or better. Maybe an hour sometimes. But that didn't last long because that was too hard. I couldn't handle it all. I couldn't hack it. It was too much. It was a terrific schedule.

Dunning: What happened after high school in terms of your work?

Metz: I went to work for the Southern Pacific in San Francisco, still living at the YMCA. The Southern Pacific building is right down on the waterfront. It was the ninth floor in the land department, SP land.

I have never had any vocation or any job that I didn't learn something. I've always seen that I've tried to find something that I hadn't accomplished before or find out what made it tick. I went to work for the Southern Pacific and I was office boy. There were forty different desks in that place, the whole ninth floor. All I had to do was pick up stuff out of one basket, shuffle it around, take it over to another basket. The other guy would pick up his stuff, take it where it was supposed to go here.

It was just like that all day long. Nobody wanted that kind of a job, but it paid me \$60 a month. I put five dollars away a month on a stock, too. Plus I was going with my wife.

Dunning: Oh, you had already met her?

Metz: Oh, yes. When I was a sophomore in high school. That's the only girl I ever went with.

Dunning: And you met her at Richmond High?

Metz: Yes. Her father was the city attorney. His name was Dan Hall.

Dunning: What was your wife's name?

Metz: Pauline. Polly, everybody said. Her father was a superior court judge in Trinity County before he came down here in 1914 or 1915. I learned considerably more than most young fellows that have an opportunity because I was invited to the house every time I turned around. Another funny thing, after about the first year or two they just acted as if I was part of the family.

I stayed out of school for one year. I had to. I couldn't make it. I worked. She graduated six months before I did. She was born in January and I was born in October. I was just that many days older than she. That's why I didn't get very good grades. We would write notes to each other. I would be in class here, write her a note. We would pass these notes

back. So I didn't get anything done as far as education was concerned.

My grades weren't what they should have been. They were all right, but I wanted to be a dentist, and I went over to what they used to call P&S, Physicians and Surgeons. My grades weren't up, and I wanted to be a dentist, so they wanted me to go back to school and make up the points. I was in love and I wouldn't go back to school for another six months. So I'm not a dentist. I didn't make it. Funny little things.

Dunning: When you were a teenager did you had certain visions of what your life was going to be like?

Metz: Yes. I wanted to be a dentist, but I hadn't made the grades to enter. That's all. I took the examination and they said I needed more math. Oh, ancient history, though, I had an A+ all the time in history. I was so interested in what happened back in the dark ages, from there on up to the Greeks and the Trojan Horse. I knew that pretty well, but my math--when you find out what I finally did, you'll say, "Jesus, what's the matter with the guy."

Dunning: Do you have any idea why you thought of dentistry?

Metz: No, I don't. I just picked it. I didn't want to be a surgeon, but I wanted to be a dentist. It's just as well, I guess, that that turned out. I've had a happy life and did as I wanted. So, what was I on?

Dunning: Well, we were talking about the Southern Pacific. I was wondering how you got your job.

Metz: All right, I'll tell you. I think I was one of the few young fellows who didn't go to work for the Standard Oil. I didn't want to. I didn't want to start it.

Dunning: Was Standard Oil recruiting at Richmond High School?

Metz: Always, yes. There was always, in those days, summer jobs. They would have the young fellows come out in the summer. Some of them went to college, and some of them did something else and few other jobs, but I think there was at least, out of the graduating class I guess there was--what did we have? About thirty boys, I suppose. There was about fifteen or twenty who went out to the Standard to work. I didn't want it.

Dunning: Why not?

Metz: I don't know. I didn't think I was too good for it. That wasn't the point at all. It just didn't look to me as if I wanted to have that as a vocation for the rest of my life. I did want to be a dentist, and I thought, "Oh, maybe someday." But then I forgot it later.

So there was the YMCA and the high school here, they had some odd jobs around here and I didn't care about that. Some fellow at the YMCA said, "Why don't you go down and see this job counselor."

So this one lady said, "Listen, would you mind working in San Francisco?"

I said, "No, I guess not." Because I was always over back and forth playing anyway. So San Francisco didn't mean a thing to me. They sent me over to the Southern Pacific. After my interview, they sent me up to the land department. That's where I started moving papers around.

Then, after that, I got to be assistant file clerk. I had to pick up all the files out of these desks and put them away. They must have had about eight or ten thousand files--for each piece of property Southern Pacific had. That meant that Southern Pacific owned property on each side of the railroad. Every odd acre. That was broken into quarter acre sections sometimes, if they started selling it independently. I had to learn all the files. They were also by base and meridian.

Then another fellow, a file clerk up at the job a little bit higher quit. It was a matter of you succeeding the guy ahead of you.

You weren't promoted. That was your next job. You had to get on the ball and learn some of that, too. So, okay, I was file clerk. Then another fellow quit. They called him conveyancer. There was where I really learned something. In the meantime I had to learn the adding machine, too.

Dunning: You were probably wishing you had your math.

Metz: Oh, yes, when I got to this one job, yes. There was a stand-up adding machine. You didn't have anything

on your desk. I learned from somebody else. You didn't go plunk, plunk, plunk, plunk. You could do just almost like a ten-key now. If you had a hundred and twenty-three, you went boom, like this, and you didn't even have to look.

So I learned that. But this conveyancer, you were responsible for all the land operations. You write all the deeds, the abstracts, the titles. You had to put your own stamps on it. There were no title companies doing it in those days.

I got this job, and there was a German lady. She knew I didn't know anything about it. "All right now," she said, "Look. You sit over there. Bring your chair around over here." She fell out of the chair one day. She was obese. But she was charming. So she said, "Bring your chair around here. Now, you just blah, blah, blah, blah, and I will type this thing out for you."

So I just said, "Well, jeez, I had a lot of fun last night." I was playing. I played with alto. She was just going like this. Then I would go over and I would act as if I was checking it over. I would read it though, so I knew. But she did that for about a year, a year and a half. I worked about four years for them.

Dunning: So that's how you learned?

Metz: Yes. But then I was able to do it myself. But at first I didn't know what a deed looked like. You had to put on your own stamps and everything on it, your

own seal. Then I left. The fellow ahead of me had been there sixteen years. I was making \$165 at that time. He was making \$180. I said, "No, I'm not going to stay in this place." He was about only ten years older than I, or eleven. I said, "No. I'm not going to stay here on that kind of a salary. Phooey." So I quit. I went to work for Woolworth's. Fifteen dollars a week. Back to my \$60.

Dunning: That was right at the Depression.

Metz: No, it was just before. But they sent me to Sacramento. We weren't married yet. We didn't get married until 1928. We went together seven years before we were married.

Anyway, I went to Sacramento. It was hotter than a crutch in Sacramento. Oh, boy. Then I got to be manager of a department. I went upstairs is all. I had charge of this department, notions. I had to do my own ordering and everything. In every one of these jobs I've always learned something.

Oh, by the way, when I was in the Southern Pacific, my erstwhile father-in-law, being an attorney, he wanted his son to be a lawyer. His son didn't want it. He was a drummer. I played in the same band as he did. He didn't want it. The father finally, while I was working at Southern Pacific, he got around to me. He didn't say too much, but he was getting me interested in law.

He called one of the attorneys for Southern Pacific in the department I was working, the land

department, a frenchman by the name of LaBradette. I bought a whole set of books. He started me out with this fellow in San Francisco.

Dunning: Is this while you were still--

Metz: While I was in Southern Pacific, yes. I'm retrogressing. I would go out to this guy's house after I would get through and I wasn't playing at night. When you turn the recorder off I'll tell you about playing, not when this is going. But I went up to his house and he would spend an hour in instruction. When I went to Woolworth's then my law had to stop.

Then, I was working at Woolworth's. We weren't going to get married. I wasn't marrying my wife until I was able to support her. I didn't think \$165 was enough, so I went to work for \$60. I was making \$75 when we got married. [laughs] That's all right. We decided we had been going together long enough, what the heck.

The family was getting to the place where they would say, "Look, when are you kids going to married?" They would come right out and say. "Gee whiz. All right, so you're only making \$65. Come on, come on."

We were married in 1928. Then the Depression came along.

Dunning: Were you still in Sacramento at that time?

Metz: Yes, when we got married. The Depression came along later. I got married then. One thing that kind of pushed us into it, Mr. Hall passed away. That meant that the brother-in-law was in San Francisco playing. He didn't send anything home hardly. So then we got married and I moved in. That's something I said I would never do, and I did it, was to move in with the family. I wanted my own. That meant that here I was the master of the house.

Dunning: You were pretty young still, in your twenties?

Metz: Yes. Anyway, it worked out ultimately.

Dunning: Who else was there?

Metz: My mother-in-law.

Dunning: Were there other brothers and sisters living there?

Metz: No, that's all there was.

Dunning: So the three of you? That would be difficult.

Metz: That made it hard for me. I had to be very careful, because, after all, it was her house and she's been used to running it for fifty years, so I had to be very careful that I didn't get out of line, but still be able to operate the best I could.

I went to work for Breuner's Furniture Store. I didn't attend college until later. So I would be playing music. I played at Tate's at the beach. I played here and there. Then on Saturday nights we got

five dollars a night for playing. That's four hours, too. You had to buy your own tux. They wore tuxes in some of these places. To help us out I played in Oakland at the American Theater. I played with the orchestra. The band moved up to the theater in Sacramento. I could get on a train, get to Sacramento, take my tux in a suitcase. I got ten dollars a night, and that was a lot of money. It was \$3.65, I think, round trip between here and Sacramento on the SP.

I took my tux in a suitcase. I would go to the train station, change my clothes, put my tux on, and then walk up to the hotel from there. It was about eight blocks carrying my trombone. I put my regular clothes in a locker.

Then when I got through playing at one o'clock, then I had to wait until three o'clock in the morning, three-thirty, until the train came through. So I would go back and change into my clothes and sit there until the train came in. I would get home. It took about two or three hours at least from Sacramento.

Dunning: And then would you have to go to work at Breuner's?

Metz: Yes. This was on Saturday night, not on Sundays, so I had Sunday. Then I would go back to work for Breuner's in Richmond.

Dunning: What a schedule.

Metz: Oh, yes. At Breuner's I was in charge of the drapery department. Breuner's didn't make their own in those days. I had a lady in Richmond who made the drapes.

Dunning: Where was Breuner's in Richmond at that point?

Metz: It was on Tenth Street, just off of Macdonald and Nevin. Then I was playing still.

For one year or a little bit better, Breuner's sent me into Oakland. Evidently I was doing pretty good in the sales. I got in there and there were fifteen salesmen, and I was the fifteenth. You had a little slot you put your name in, blup, blup, blup, like this.

So you stood at the front door. You had a department you had to take care of. You had to clean it up and see that the finisher was in and everything. You got through with a customer, and then you waited until your slot came as they came in through the door. You would take the next one. If they came in four or five of them, the slot went down fast. You had to sit down there and hang around.

Here I was a green pea. They had all been working for Breuner's for twenty or twenty-five years. How the heck I got shot in there, I don't know. I did a pretty good job, I guess, in Richmond here.

I got in here, and oh boy. I got all the terrible-looking customers. The boys knew all the ropes, and "Oh, hello Mrs. Jones." Finally I found out, he didn't know Mrs. Jones from anybody else, but

it looked like she had some money. He grabbed personals. A person would come in and ask for you personally, it didn't make any difference. That was yours no matter if you were clear at the bottom of the slot. That was your customer.

Dunning: Were you on commission?

Metz: Yes, you got a salary and commission. This is one funny little story on the side I'll tell you about later if you don't want it on this thing.

Dunning: No, this is fine.

Metz: All right. I had been there about a year and I was doing pretty good. I made a pretty good salary. I was about halfway up the ladder on this little slot, and there were two or three guys who were good at it. I had learned by then to watch out for them. They would take anything away from you if they possibly could. This was the story that really made me teed off.

A lady came in. She was an elderly lady. I think she was Italian. He said, "Hey Cliff, my customer is just coming in here. Take this lady."

"Okay."

She said, "I want the card table. I want the card table." I took her over. I went up to the card table, and told her how it worked, and all this, and put it up next to some furniture so she saw how it looked. It was only about \$3.95 or \$5 in those days.

When she got down she said, "Thank you, thank you. You got card?"

"Yes." I gave her my card.

She said, "I remember you. I'll remember you." The other guys were kind of giving her the business, you know. My God, about six months later she came in. Her daughter was getting married.

She said, "I want a Mr. Metz. Mr. Metz." The guys all looked like this. But here she had the beautiful-looking daughter. I think the father was along. She said, "They got a new home. I want furniture for a new home."

So, there were three of them, and one of them in particular. I was taking them over to look at dining sets and a bedroom set. I was about three hours. In the meantime, these guys always had something to do around where I was. They got her name and her address, which I had. They went downstairs quickly, one of them. He went to one of the Breuners, I won't mention his name. He was in charge of all the sales.

He said, "Hey, Cliff's taking over my customer up there. Blah, blah, blah, blah."

So when I came down I must have had \$5,000, and that's a lot of money in those days. I wrote it all up.

"But Cliff," he said, "that was so-and-so's customer."

I said, "No it wasn't."

"Oh, yes."

The salesman said, "Oh, no, I've waited on her all--"

I said, "It was a personal that came in for me. I'm going to get that lady in here."

Breuner said, "Oh, that would embarrass us."

I said, "Well, then I get my sales?"

"Well, no, because it was Joe's."

I said, "No, it wasn't." So the lady came back in for something. She had to come back to pick out the color or something. I told her about it. She went in and raised particular heck. I got credit for the sale. Aren't there funny things like that. You learn to keep your eyes in the back of your head and everything else. That's beside the point as far as this is concerned.

Dunning: You said you had your lunch appointment at twelve thirty, so this is probably a good time to stop.

Metz: No, no. That's perfectly all right, because the Rotary Club is going to have lunch and I don't want to eat lunch anyway, and I know where they're going to

eat. They know me. Sometimes, as far as eating, I don't eat lunch hardly ever. Let's go on for a little while.

Dunning: I have about five minutes left on this tape.

Metz: All right, let's do it then. You go ahead.

Dunning: How many years were you at Breuner's all together?

Metz: God, I don't know. About three, probably, four. I have a resume of what I did, when I did it. I could get that out and have it for you next time if you want it.

Dunning: Okay. Actually, that might be good if you can find it.

Metz: Oh, yes.

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